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Shared Lives: Women Who Wrote for Women

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SHARED LIVES:

WOMEN WHO WROTE FOR WOMEN

A STUDY OF FOUR FEMALE AUTHORS:

JANET LAMBERT, GEORGETTE HEYER, FRANCES PARKINSON KEYES,

AND INEZ HAYNES GILLMORE IRWIN

BY ANDREA CARON KEMPF

I. INTRODUCTION

This is a study of women who wrote fiction for women. It is an attempt to locate the points where their lives and works converged and to discover what messages implicit, explicit, and subliminal, were broadcast to the readers at those intersections. It is, simply, a very personal examination of the lives and works of four fascinating women whose fiction, for one reason or another, has mattered to me. In addition, it is not a judgmental study of women's fiction. It is a given that tens of millions of American women read pulp fiction every year. Janice Radway, in her wonderful and very academically sound book, *Reading the Romance*, has thoroughly examined the nature of romance fiction and the act of reading it; and many other scholars of popular culture

and women's issues have drawn their own conclusions about the role of romance fiction in women's lives. Indeed, according to Radway's book, none of these novelists, with the exception of Georgette Heyer, actually qualify as romance writers. Whatever the scholars conclude, women will continue to consume these novels. It may be true, to paraphrase Marx, that pulp romances are the opiate of women; but it is also true that the particular authors in this study were sincere in their attempts to produce quality fiction. Sometimes they succeeded.

The genesis of this study occurred twelve years ago when my daughter, then ten years old, decided to read every novel in the children's room of the Weld County Colorado Library that had the word "love" in its title. Among her first selections was *Love to Spare* by Janet Lambert. I had never read anything by Lambert or even heard of her. Being a compulsive reader, I read everything my daughter brought home as well as my own library selections. The Lambert book horrified me. I couldn't remember reading such pap; but my daughter liked it well enough to bring home, the following week, several other titles by the same author. It was then that I discovered Janet Lambert's generational obsession with the Jordan and Parrish families. I was hooked. Greeley, Colorado, where we were living, was blessed with two fine public libraries. Between them, I was able to read close to forty of Lambert's books. Being a librarian, I located the other titles through interlibrary loan. One day I embarrassedly described my latest passion to a friend who taught history at the university where I worked. Rather than looking at me as if I were crazy for reading the fifty-four books of an obscure, not-very-good author of teenage romances, he said, "It sounds publishable." So for the next three months at work, during a few free minutes a day, I wrote down my observations about Janet Lambert and her novels. I even received a small grant from the University Research and Publication Committee to have the paper typed. That was the end of it. Shortly after I completed a first draft of my study of Janet Lambert, I changed jobs. We moved to a suburb of Kansas City; and I spent several years

settling into my new college and community, watching my children grow up, and making many changes in my own lifestyle. Janet Lambert came along with me, but except for one or two cursory glances, she remained in her folder.

Georgette Heyer came next. My discovery of her work was serendipitous. I was reading a woman's magazine while waiting in a dentist's office when I discovered an article on women and romance fiction. In the article, the author noted that certain women, including an attorney friend of his or hers, rationalize their enjoyment of romance fiction by explaining that they only read "high class" romances like those of Georgette Heyer. Never having heard of Heyer, I decided to experience first-hand a "high class" author of romances. Since then I have read all of Heyer's novels at least three times, many of them more times than that. Somewhere along the way, I knew that I would like to write about Heyer the way I had written about Janet Lambert. I began to think that my interest in certain women authors of popular fiction had the makings of a short monograph. The question was when I would find the time to actually write it.

The third author I discovered was more in the nature of a rediscovery. Frances Parkinson Keyes was one of my mother's favorite authors. When I was growing up, there was always a Keyes book around the house. For some reason my mother, who usually read paperback books, owned hard-bound copies of *The Career of David Noble* and *Dinner at Antoine's*. I probably read each of those books three or four times when I was at home. My mother particularly liked the way the author depicted sex, and in my teens when *Peyton Place* was the number one favorite with my peers, I was urged to read anything I could find by Keyes. That meant I read everything she wrote that was in the Albuquerque Public Library. Later, when the idea of a book became more likely, Frances Parkinson Keyes seemed ideal as one of my authors. I now had an author for my daughter, an author for myself, and an author for my mother.

Inez Irwin, who came last, was actually the first author of the four that I read. She was a childhood favorite. I owned all of the Maida books and have fond memories

of several episodes in them. A few years ago, I was describing to a friend from Boston the series of children's books about a group of poor children from Charlestown. I couldn't remember the author, but remembered all of their titles began *Maida's Little* When I looked them up and followed through by looking up the author, I discovered that Inez Irwin was not only an author of books for children, but also a suffragist. Did she impart her liberal political views in the children's books? I couldn't remember, but Irwin seemed to fit naturally into the scheme of my book. Now I had an author for myself as a child.

In addition, I had an author of children's books, one who wrote for teenage girls, one who wrote mainstream bestsellers for adults, and one who wrote genre novels. I would have liked to locate an author of mysteries or science fiction who fit my research design; however, mystery and science fiction authors write for a more general audience. Women like Agatha Christie or Dorothy Sayers appeal as much to men as to women. I know that there exists a group of women authors today who write mysteries and science fiction directed towards women, but they were rejected because they are still alive. From the beginning, I wanted to look at completed lives and bodies of works. I wanted to examine authors who wrote before the advent of computers and word processors -- women for whom the act of authorship was a word by word commitment. All four of these women -- Janet Lambert, Georgette Heyer, Frances Parkinson Keyes, Inez Irwin -- meet these criteria. They wrote for women in the middle of this century, before the mass-produced romance became big business. They took themselves seriously, and as Inez Irwin says:

First, there are two things about writing that many people do not understand. I believe that many authors do not understand them. One is that creation is exactly as difficult for bad or indifferent authors as for good or great ones. The other thing is that delight in the accomplished work is exactly as exhilarating (sic) to bad or indifferent authors as to good or great ones. All enjoy it tinglingly.
(*Adventures of Yesterday*, p. 492)

I have taken them seriously too.

Completing this study has been made possible by the receipt of a sabbatical leave from Johnson County Community College where I am currently a reference librarian. The fact that a group of individuals believed in me and in this project has been gratifying from the start. Never before have I been paid to write and research. My colleagues at the library have been extremely helpful, answering obscure reference questions over the phone when I needed to check a fact before proceeding, tracking down endless numbers of book reviews and out of print material through interlibrary loan, and reading and correcting this manuscript. To the Sabbatical Leave Committee, the Board of Trustees of Johnson County Community College, the college librarians, particularly those in interlibrary loan, and to my family and friends who have taken me seriously, I want to extend my sincere thanks. It has been “exhilarating” and I have enjoyed it “tinglingly.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the course of this study I have provided a bibliography of each author’s novels and major non-fiction works at the end of her chapter. In the case of Georgette Heyer and Inez Irwin, these bibliographies were originally assembled by their biographers, Jane Aiken Hodge and Mary Kathleen Trigg. The bibliographies of the works of Janet Lambert and Frances Parkinson were of my own making, developed largely from information provided by their publishers at the beginning of their later works.

II. JANET LAMBERT

Janet Lambert's death in 1973 was noted by a brief obituary in *Publisher's Weekly* (April 9, 1973) reporting the fact that E. P. Dutton had lost a prolific author. Prolific is an understatement in respect to Lambert, who from 1941 to 1969 published fifty-four books for young teenage girls; and although she neither won any literary prizes nor received genuinely glowing reviews, her books were still circulating in public libraries and schools twenty years after the last one was published.

An initial look at Lambert's books is enough to bring shudders to any self-respecting member of the woman's movement or any proponent of reality in teen literature. The world within the covers of a book like *Love to Spare* appears syrupy and artificial. There is the inevitable teen courtship of a clean-cut heroine who belongs to a perfect, loving family, basking in their wholesomeness, calling each other by cutesie nicknames, suffering the emotional ups and downs of whose sister should be flower girl at the wedding. However, looking at the second, third, and fourth Lambert books there is another aspect of the oeuvre -- the generational scope of her novels. What emerges is the fact that of Lambert's fifty-four novels, twenty-seven comprise an extended generational novel in which the heroes and heroines of the final books are the sons and daughters of the protagonist of her first works. Lambert devoted more than four thousand pages to her history of the Jordan and Parrish families and incorporated characters from her Drayton family and Candy Kane series into later Jordan/Parrish books; thus, thirty-two of her novels became a single saga of American life during the middle thirty years of the twentieth century.

Also intriguing is the fact that Lambert did not even begin writing until her late forties, after her daughter was grown. Her first book, *Star Spangled Summer*, wasn't published until she was forty-seven. She then produced two books a year for the next twenty seven years, retiring when she was seventy-three. In and of itself, her publishing record is a considerable achievement, especially before the age of word-processors.

While the literary merit of Lambert's work is negligible, the social messages, both explicit and implicit, are worth examining. Several generations of girls eagerly awaited each new title. Even today's readers, brought up on the socially self-conscious novels of Judy Blume and Norma Klein, find something appealing in her books, and like their mothers read on from book to book, wondering whom Penny Parrish will finally marry or worrying about Ginger Johnston's adjustment to her new home.

Like most successful authors, Lambert incorporated much of her own biography into the lives of her heroines. Born in 1894, she grew up in Crawfordsville, Indiana, a pleasant college town. Janet Snyder was a successful actress who left the stage to marry the boy next door, Captain Kent Lambert, a career military officer. The Lamberts' married life was spent on a succession of Army posts; their retirement, on a small, island off the coast of New Jersey. All of this appears in the novels. Penny Parrish, like her creator, becomes an actress. The Parrishes, the Jordans, and the Kanes are all military families. In the Campbell family saga, one of the later series, the Campbells live in a quiet Indiana college town, and the heroine Josie Campbell becomes a writer living on an island off the New Jersey coast. Writing about the life she knew gave Lambert's books verisimilitude, while focusing sympathetically on the typical problems of teenage girls gave the books their perennial appeal. The heroines were blissfully free of faults and singularly successful in all their endeavors; Lambert, however, was never condescending in her treatment of their concerns -- concerns that may seem trivial to adults, but are still important and immediate to her readers. The readers of today's sophisticated world, however, are more likely to be in the ten to fourteen-year-old age group rather than the fourteen to eighteen-year-olds she intended to reach; and the books are more successful as parts of a series than as individual titles.

Many of the later books end inconclusively as the author's obsession with her characters led her to begin a new title in a series whose narrative picks up the story a few hours after the previous title's narrative concluded. It is the development of the family history over several books that is so fascinating. The characters do not remain eternally teenage figures like Nancy Drew. They continue to grow and experience new events, both personal and historical. Golden-haired Tippy Parrish, a toddler playing with dolls in Lambert's first novel *Star Spangled Summer*, is the mother of two and the guardian of a new teenaged heroine in her last novel *Here's Marny*. While change

and growth may be words too strong to describe the progress of Lambert heroines, they do face problems, the solutions to which allow them to strengthen their better natures.

The message to girls concerning the nature of womanhood is the single most important aspect of Lambert's work. Briefly, all young women are guaranteed at least two eligible suitors and a courtship that will not proceed too smoothly, but will culminate in marriage to the right man who usually will be somewhat older than the young woman. This man will always provide his family with a comfortable income and a high standard of living.

While this is Lambert's promise to her readers, the reality of her books is not exactly stereotypical and, in subtle ways, contrary to her ideals. The role played by fathers, for example, is ambiguous. In the Campbell series, Josie Campbell's impractical father fails to provide any material support for his family -- leaving responsibility for their hand-to-mouth existence to his almost equally impractical artist wife and his two very practical daughters. In *Just Jenifer*, the book that introduces the Jordan family, General Jordan goes off to war, leaving his nine children in the care of an incompetent housekeeper who decamps in the first chapter. From then on, it is sixteen-year-old Jenifer who manages the family financially as well as physically and emotionally. Christie Drayton's father in *Where the Heart Is* fails to provide a home for his family, forcing them to trespass in the old barn of a reclusive and hostile cousin. In all of these books, it is a young resourceful daughter who solves the family's problems. In each case, she sets the family's house in order, literally, by means of her own hard work and ingenuity; but finally because of her winning personality and generous nature, she wins the heart of some rich *deus ex machina* who assures the family's continued solvency. Other examples of inadequate fathers include Carrol Houghton's widowed father Langdon in *Star Spangled Summer*. Houghton is too busy making money to offer his daughter more than large checks every now and then rather than the affection she craves, and he has to be taught by the Parrish family how to relate to Carrol in an

appropriately paternal manner. In *Candy Kane*, Candy's father is too busy catering to the whims of his spoiled wife to recognize the loneliness of his youngest daughter or to appreciate her good qualities. Only Colonel Dave Parrish, father of Penny, Tippy, *et al.* is portrayed as an active father, perhaps modeled on Lambert's own spouse.

This lack of strong fathers may reflect the realities of army life where the job of child rearing and financial management were largely the wife's responsibility. The conversation between Colonel Parrish and his wife Marjorie, after he receives orders to leave immediately for England, exemplifies the ideal military wife:

"The Chief of Cavalry phoned me. Oh, Marjie, do you think you can get along without me?"

"Not very well, but I'll make a stab at it." She reached up to kiss him, to explain into his bewildered worry, "You know perfectly well that while I'll miss you, I'm a very capable woman."

"Yes, I guess you are," he answered relieved. "Although you certainly don't look it -- or act it most of the time."

"That's camouflage, Colonel Parrish. I may be deceptively decorated on the outside, but I'm as sturdy as a rock underneath."
(*Glory Be*, p.59)

Absent fathers, however, may also reflect the reality of Lambert's own life. Her father died when she was twelve; and from her personal accounts, Janet Snyder took charge of her own life, overwhelming her mother's objections to whatever her high-spirited daughter's plans were. Interestingly, the author designed for the younger generation of her heroines and heroes a more idealistic representation of family life. Young husbands like David and Bobby Parrish leave the army to satisfy their brides. Josh MacDonald encourages his wife (Penny Parrish) in her career. When Jon Drayton is widowed in *A Bright Tomorrow*, he actively takes up the role of single parent, unlike his earlier counterpart Langdon Houghton. Young husbands who fail to consider their wife's feelings like Barton Reed and Chris Matthews, both in the *Candy Kane* series are immediately straightened out. Candy tells her brother-in-law Chris:

Your work. That's your life, not Leigh. If Leigh mattered to you, you wouldn't doddle along with a book you may sell

and may not; you wouldn't let her skimp and do without for your own selfish pleasure. You'd get a job like other men and write the book at odd times. Leigh isn't stupid; she sees it just as the rest of us do -- even though we try to make her think she doesn't.

...I'm saying that you're very, very thoughtless and selfish. I'm saying that Leigh's spoiled but she's trying to do a good job; that she married you because she needs a strong man. She got on the beam while you were overseas and ran a nursery so young couples could go out together and have fun before the boys were ordered off. She talked about the fun you two had had and were going to have when you came back, so she tried to make the same thing possible for other girls. But you've let her down. You're the one who's having all the fun, and you're having it alone.

(*One For the Money* p. 89-90)

Candy, who is one of Lambert's most *liberated* heroines eventually decides to pursue a singing career despite her husband Barton's jealousy of the world of entertainment. In *A Song in Their Hearts*, Candy and Barton go to a nightclub where an old friend of Candy's invites her to sing a few numbers with his orchestra. Barton walks out during the applause which precipitates first, an argument and finally, Candy's realization that Barton has no right to prevent her from singing.

"I'm not talking about tonight -- it's ruined. It was ruined when I was afraid to go down and sing, afraid to sing *Stardust*, afraid to talk to Sketch a second longer than I had to. Tonight was only the result of the many, many times you've made me feel I had no right to be a person."

"Why, Candy! ... I didn't mean to make you feel like that," he said.

"You 'didn't mean to.'" Candy smiled sadly and shook her head. "You never mean to, Barton, and you're always sorry after you do...."

"Well, doesn't it help if I know I'm wrong?"

"No." She shook her head without looking up. "Not any more it doesn't. Not tonight or any time to come."

(*A Song in Their Hearts*, p. 130-131)

Later when Candy has an interview with her bandleader friend, she turns down his job offer saying, "Men can have a career, but women have to fit one in." He replies, "It doesn't always work that way. A man can be proud of his wife's career, just as she's proud of his, and they can go along together." (*A Song in Their Hearts*, p. 159)

Nonetheless, although Lambert herself gave up a promising career in the theater to marry, she did not allow her heroines the same error. Penny Parrish chooses to marry a man of the theater rather than one of her many army suitors. In one of the last Penny Parrish novels *The Reluctant Heart*, the heroine decides to give up the theater and stay home to devote herself to her children. No one applauds that decision. Her family is appalled, recognizing Penny's need for a career, aware that she would be unfulfilled in a full-time parenting and homemaking role. Two other heroines become successful authors -- Josie Campbell, heroine of a later series becomes a successful writer, and Bitsy Jordan, youngest of the Jordan clan, enjoys a career as an author/illustrator of children's books. And, by the time Penny's younger sister Tippy eagerly discards a career in television to marry Peter Jordan, she has already proven her worth as a capable production assistant.

Tippy's rapid promotions in television -- within weeks of beginning work, she takes over for her sick boss and displays her competence -- demonstrate another Lambert canon: women who work will be instantly successful -- a canon probably based more on Lambert's own experiences than on the Cinderella myth. As a young woman, Janet Snyder went backstage after a play and informed the leading actor Walker Whitesides that she was a better actress than his ingenue. Whitesides agreed. He hired her as a member of his touring company. The young woman, accompanied by the chaperone upon which her mother insisted, acted with Whitesides and other theatrical companies for two and a half years until her marriage. Almost twenty-five years later when she wrote her first book, *Star Spangled Summer*, Lambert finished the book on a Thursday, and E. P. Dutton accepted it for publication on Friday. In fact, Dutton liked the novel so well that the fledgling author was offered a contract to write two books a year indefinitely -- a contract she fulfilled for twenty-seven years. In essence, Lambert's heroines only reflect their author's own experiences. The novels are peppered with advice about women needing strong providers, but circumstantial evidence proves the

opposite. In addition most of the women have more interesting careers. The men like Bobby and David Parrish leave the Army to make their wives happy; but nowhere in the novels are men's jobs like insurance salesman or owner of an automobile dealership made glamorous or appealing. Men work because they must support their families. Careers in the military are also unglamorous. There, the men serve because they have an obligation to support their country, whereas women work to fulfill themselves and their careers are creative.

A frequent criticism of Lambert's work is that her heroines are too good to be true. "Young girls, uncomfortably aware of their own shortcomings, may wish that Jenifer owned at least one fault,..." (*New York Times*, September 2, 1945, p.18). She does, however, provide a foil for her good girls, i.e. bad girls. In her first novel *Star Spangled Summer*, the reader meets spoiled, manipulative Louise Frasier who traps boys into dating her, gossips meanly about her rivals, sulks when she isn't the center of attention, and, at the end of the book, is responsible for Carrol Houghton's fall from a horse. Throughout the five Penny Parrish books, Louise serves as an off-and-on menace to Penny and Carrol's happiness. Louise is the prototype for a parade of future female villains. Leigh Kane, Candy's older sister, is beautiful, spoiled, selfish, and vain, and like Louise, Leigh is always manipulating events. Leigh is allowed a measure of redemption. She marries a poor journalist. Then, after scandalizing her family by dating while her husband is overseas, she demonstrates her deeply buried but inborn good qualities by organizing and running a babysitting service for the wives of servicemen.

Another bad sister, Gwenn Jordan, only gets worse as the series progresses. Her name becomes synonymous with antisocial behavior. Various Jordan girls -- there are four other sisters -- worry about being *Gwennish*. Endlessly the Jordans wonder how Gwenn could be a member of their family. Poor Gwenn throws tantrums, makes a rash marriage for which she suffers the consequences throughout the Jordan/Parrish series,

has a nervous breakdown, and worst of all from (Lambert's perspective) wears too much makeup, dyes her hair, and dresses inappropriately. It's easy to imagine a naive reader drawing the conclusion that if she wore mascara and dyed her hair, she might suffer the fate of Gwenn Jordan.

While the Lambert heroines are sweet as saccharine and almost without fault, the heroes are best described as sturdy oaks, a metaphor she uses and reuses throughout the novels. Like most trees, these characters are distinguishable only by different barks and leaves, but do not escape their essential woodenness. Josh MacDonald is dark and thin; David Parrish has blond curls; his son Davy, a hero of later books, is also blond, but limps; Jon Drayton is called a *blond Viking*, and Paul Banning, a *blond Indian*. Their function is, however, always the same. They serve as sounding boards for their girls. They listen, offer suggestions, act as bulwarks for the girls, who have much richer emotional lives than their male counterparts, feel hurt if they think their girl friends are rejecting them, but are always easily consoled if they lose their girl friends to rivals. Only one male character is interesting in his own right. Mercurial Bobby Parrish, brother of David, Penny and Tippy, pursues one Jordan girl after another until he eventually wins Susan. The five volumes that chronicle Bobby and Susan's up-and-down romance are among the most engaging in the Jordan/Parrish series. For once, Lambert was writing about a hero as appealing as her heroine. Bobby plays practical jokes to engage Susan's attention, shows up when he shouldn't, calls at inappropriate times, bribes her younger sister, and in general, behaves in a manner that Lambert terms dishonorable. He is, however, a member of the Parrish family which means his good qualities eventually assert themselves, but not before the reader becomes fond of him for having a personality characterized by something more than pride, good sense and "manliness" -- an undefinable term Lambert continually used to describe all that was good in males.

The Lambert universe was exclusively white, Anglo-Saxon, and affluent. The only African-Americans were servants. The Parrishes are waited on by a succession of black orderlies. This seemingly was the only function of African-Americans in the United States Army. They have a faithful cook Trudy, who, in true *Mammy* fashion, keeps the children in line while dispensing advice and chocolate pie whenever needed. Candy Kane also has her family retainers, Joe and Cleoretta who are so attached to the Kanes that they'd rather work for practically no wages rather than leave them. The black servants are an asset to their families. The white servants are usually a burden. The Draytons' ill-tempered Bertha, the Hollisters' hysterical Stella, the Jordans' incompetent Rosie -- each needs more reassurance and help than she actually provides the family. Aside from servants, however, lower class whites never make an appearance in the Lambert world. Anyone without money has a pedigreed background, e.g. the Campbell family who are the *creme de la creme* of Indiana society despite Professor Campbell's unwillingness to work, or Paul Banning of the Cinda series whose patrician family has lost their wealth forcing Paul to work. The nearest thing to common folk in all the Lambert books are Joe and Letty Smith -- he a common soldier, she a clerk in a drug store whom Penny Parrish befriends. Penny's wealthy sister-in-law Carrol settles the Smiths as caretakers on her estate, and they disappear from the novels -- another pair of servants.

Much of the fascination in reading the Lambert books is provided by the small details of the lives of her characters. Activities that were taken for granted in the 1940's and 1950's literally chill the blood of the reader in the 1980's and 1990's. In one amazing scene in *Glory Be*, the young lovers David Parrish and Carrol Houghton complete their picnic on the Hudson in less than currently politically acceptable fashion: "Reaching over, she stuffed the papers and her cup into the sack and whisked through her housekeeping by tossing the sack into the river." (*Glory Be*, p. 160)

Another shock occurs in *A Song in Their Hearts*. Tippy Parrish Jordan has difficulty coping with a fretful baby -- less than two months old -- and in desperation goes to her doctor.

"She has a long-sounding name that means she's having a terrible time adjusting to this new world and to us. I get nervous, and I make her nervous. Every time I pick her up her little hands fly out -- and if a baby could look panic-stricken, she does.... It's as simple as that. She's allergic to me!"

"What did he suggest you do?" Candy asked...

"Why, he prescribed a sedative for her," Tippy answered, "to calm her jangled nerves...."

(*A Song in Their Hearts*, p. 107)

Tippy's baby isn't the only one to use drugs. There is also the high incidence of smoking by the various heroes. Female characters, of course, are rarely described with cigarette in hand, except bad girls like Gwenn Jordan who is a chain smoker.

Although the author may not have realized it, her descriptions of hazing at West Point convey not a charming rite of passage for young men, but rather a terrifying experience in which older boys take delight in terrorizing younger ones. Young David Parrish develops psychosomatic blindness as a result of the pressure of his first year at the academy. Peter and Neal Jordan, Bobby and Davy Parrish, each in turn, proves his manhood by enduring ridicule from upperclassmen. A typical example of hazing occurs when David Parrish and his roommate Michael are in their room preparing for breakfast.

...the door was flung open.

"Mr. Dumbjohn."

"Yes sir." David jumped up, and threw out his chest until his elbows were but a few inches apart behind him, drew his chin into the braid of his collar, and stood at rigid attention.

"You look too happy this morning." The upperclassman who had burst in upon his privacy glared at him. "Wipe off that smile."

"Yes, sir." David passed a hand over his face and returned to his pose.

"And you, Mr. Dooflicket." The tormentor cast a critical eye upon Michael. "Get your shoulders back. I said *back!*" he ordered as the buttons on Michael's blouse strained from the pull. "Don't you know what back is, Mr. Dooflicket?"

"Yes, sir."

"Elucidate."

"Back is the opposite of front sir. To or towards the rear; behind."

“Then get ‘em back.”
A bugle sounded and he disappeared as suddenly as he had come
(*Dreams of Glory*, p.92)

When, in one of the final books, Davy Parrish’s roommate goes AWOL, unwilling to endure the humiliation so many of the previous young men at the Military Academy endured, he seems to be the only sensible cadet at the Point despite the fact that the author condemns his behavior.

Lambert was deeply conservative, and she exhibits her conservatism in a variety of situations. The manner in which she portrays the acting profession is one. Broadway is good; Hollywood is bad. Penny Parrish and Josh MacDonald are acceptable in good society. Their Broadway associates are, for the most part, respectable. In fact, in a late book in the series, *Introducing Parri*, Penny and Josh’s daughter Parri befriends a teenage actress April Showers. As long as April wears flashy clothes and heavy makeup, she doesn’t succeed on Broadway. When she scrubs her face and dresses more conservatively, April wins parts and acceptance both in the legitimate theater and in the Parrish/Jordan social circle. Hollywood, as personified by Bill Hanley and his wife Gwenn Jordan, is a constant round of cocktail parties, women whose faces are coated with makeup, artificial friendships, too little sleep combined with too much drinking and too little eating. Even adultery, never explicitly mentioned, but strongly hinted at, is a trait of Hollywood. The artificiality of Gwenn and Bill is compared to the genuineness of Penny and Josh, implying that had Bill pursued a career on Broadway, he and Gwenn would have had a better marriage and a better life.

From the beginning, Lambert repeatedly emphasized her belief that America was the best country in which to live. Her brand of patriotism was a total unquestioning loyalty to the USA. From the lurid melodrama of Penny Parrish capturing a spy in *up Goes the Curtain* to Tippy Parrish’s hysteria over post-war Germany in *Little Miss Atlas*,

the constant message was that we live in the best country in the world and anyone who questioned the fact was probably a traitor. In *Little Miss Atlas*, Tippy's boy friend Ken Prescott observes the unloading of the personal belongings of American military personnel from a ship in a German harbor.

Ken walked back to the rail and looked down at all the activity. Trunks and boxes were coming out of the hold.... Soon the cars would roll out. American cars that Americans must have. American clothes, American cars, he thought, trade mark of an industrious people.

Ken was proud of the scene. He was proud of his compatriots who brought their electric gadgets with them, their refrigerators, sanitary wire screening, and washing machines; who bought and planned for comfort.

"They live -- *right!*" he silently told the crates. "They're what makes America good. And even if it costs a lot to get the stuff over here, Uncle Sam wants them to have it. He wants them to stay used to *good living*."

(*Little Miss Atlas*, p.48)

The author reemphasized her patriotism year after year, as she sent her fictional soldiers first off to World War II, then Korea, and in her final book *Here's Marny*, where Peter Parrish was off to Vietnam. But the soldier's wife did not actually thrill to the sound of trumpets. In *Miss America* Penny and her mother discuss the impending Korean War.

Mrs. Parrish squared her thin shoulders and said gently, "You must remember dear, that -- if we have a war -- it will be my third one. I've sent your father off twice, and David once. I can do it again. I can keep on doing it, with Bobby and the little boys, if need be, to keep our country safe. We have to keep our country, Penny."

"Yes, but I want it over before Joshu grows up. I can't bear to look at him and feel I mustn't scold him or spank him because he may go to war and be killed some day. It isn't right to rear little boys for bullets and little girls to suffer."

"There have always been wars, child."

"But not the kind we have now," Penny cried passionately. "Men went off to war and came home. Whole cities weren't bombed and destroyed. Little children weren't taught to drop down on the floor and cover up their heads. Oh, Mums," she said with tears in her eyes, "how are they going to stop it?"

"I think women will," her mother answered quietly. "I think that someday women, who bring life into the world and so value it more than men, will see that the peace is kept, that their children grow up to normal lives. The Russian women love their children, Penny; the North Koreans, the Germans, American, British, French. Women are all alike the world over. We must have more of them in politics. That's the way to stop war."

"Why, Mums," Penny said surprised, "I didn't know you thought like this."

"I didn't either, honey, until lately." Mrs. Parrish admitted. "I've come to see that international trade doesn't mean as much to women as human life does. We would never barter men for our country's economic prosperity. I listen to the radio and what men have to say, but I know women wouldn't run the world the way they do. We wouldn't, that's all." she ended.
(*Miss America*, p. 166-167)

Although this could hardly be called a feminist perspective, Lambert quietly betrays her contempt for the profession of war that has been her life. One by one she eased her fictional young men out of the military profession, all the while proclaiming the virtues of the military.

Reality, when it intruded into the Lambert world, usually took the form of illness or death. In *Glory Be* Langdon Houghton dies of a mysterious illness just before David

Parrish marries Houghton's daughter Carrol. Later Carrol and David cope with their son Davy's bout with polio. Davy not only survives the illness, but recovers to the point where he is accepted at West Point. Tippy Parrish's first love Ken Prescott is killed in Korea. Then in one of the last books, *A Bright Tomorrow*, Alice Jordan Drayton is killed in an automobile accident. This is not an overwhelming amount of tragedy for a twenty-seven book series, even if one adds in two nervous breakdowns: Gwenn Jordan's hysterical one and Carrol Houghton Parrish's quiet one.

By the 1960's, the novels are shrill. Lambert could neither tolerate or try to understand the generation of socially conscious individuals with their long hair, loud music, and blue jeans who seemed to be omnipresent. In *Triple Trouble* Cinda Hollister develops a crush on an unwashed poet, but soon recognizes his deficiencies and returns to the family fold. Josie Campbell makes short work of a would-be campus radical in *First of All*. She knows that if he bathes more frequently, cuts his hair, and gives up his jeans, he'll fit in on campus and be happy. Incapable of going beyond appearances, the author and her increasingly less realistic heroines couldn't recognize the ideals, concerns and real fears for world destruction that motivated a generation totally unlike those well-dressed, well-mannered, and essentially empty-headed boys and girls she remembered.

Reviews of the early Lambert books were laudatory. Ellen Buell of the *New York Times* wrote of *Star Spangled Summer*

This is a thoroughly pleasant story for girls of the early teenage. There is no artificial glamour of military life about it -- just a friendly account of young people who grew up in a special tradition, but of young people whose activities, reactions, and conversations are, save for an occasional lapse into sentimentality, recorded with so much knowledge of present-day youth that they seem to have been described by one of their own contemporaries. (*New York Times*, Feb., 16, 1941, p. 10)

Kirkus Review said of *Just Jenifer* that the book portrayed “Nice kids, and wholesome treatment of juvenile questions.” (Aug. 1, 1945, p. 341)

The *Christian Science Monitor* was lavish in its praise for *Dreams of Glory*. Girls will find the story almost breathtaking, so rapid is the tempo Penny and her friend Carrol maintain as they move from one scene and one event to another. Good characterizations, story interest, a romance plus a picture of life at the Academy awaits the reader of this up-to-the-minute book about and for young moderns. (Aug., 27, 1942, p.10)

These reviews, however, were in the early 1940's when, with World War II in progress, patriotism was at its height. The reviewers of the 1960's had a very different opinion of Lambert's work. The following examples are from *Library Journal*. By the 1960's the *New York Times* was no longer reviewing her books.

About *Stagestruck Parri*: “This is the usual Lambert story with a cast of pink and perfect people set in a background of spun sugar” (*School Library Journal*, Dec., 1966, p. 65). And about *Here's Marny*: “Twenty years ago, Mrs. Lambert's books may have provided acceptable escape reading -- but today they don't even make it on that level.”(June, 15, 1969, p.2510) And in summation, a review of *First of All*: “At a time when we are more than ever conscious of the young teen-agers' sophistication and their demand and need for quality, Janet Lambert's particular style of drivel is all the more cloying and inconsequential.” (June,15,1966, p.3268)

When faced with such vitriolic comments, the question must be raised: Why even bother to reexamine Janet Lambert's work? Although she was a competent storyteller, she was not a particularly good writer. During the last fifteen years of her publishing life, her inability to understand the social changes that were occurring gave many novels a shrill, unrealistic tone. In what may be her worst series, the Cinda Hollister books, Cinda and her family encounter such villains of modern life as dirty, shiftless Greenwich Village poets, modern decorating, fast sports cars, baseball scouts, and Chinese food. All these monsters are vanquished by the Hollister family's

cohesiveness. Never is Lambert's xenophobia so apparent. When Cinda's brother Warren says he's bringing home a college roommate for Christmas because the boy's family lives in the Orient, the Hollisters panic. They imagine a foreigner, someone of another race who will neither look like they do nor eat what they eat. Imagine their relief when the boy turns out to be the son of a United States diplomat. In another book Mrs. Hollister even frets because Warren's fiancée Melody Ayer is the daughter of a musician in a symphony orchestra. This fear of people who are different was always an undercurrent in Lambert's novels. In a relatively early title, *Little Miss Atlas*, Tippy Parrish suffers dreadfully from the experience of living in Germany -- away from the virtues of America. But when the freshness of her novels faded and all the plots became formalistic, the xenophobia was glaring and petulant.

Janet Lambert, therefore, was teaching her readers not only the virtues of femininity and marriage, but also the necessity of fitting in, being part of the crowd, whether it was the crowd at the country club or the bigger crowd of white, Anglo-Saxon, upper class America. This is what her thousands and thousands of readers learned. But there is the other side: the fact of her authorship -- fifty-four novels written after the age of forty-seven; the amazing scope of the Jordan/Parrish series, a family saga of more than 4,000 pages describing a segment of America from the late 1930's to the Vietnam era of the late 1960's. There were also the other messages, the ones she unintentionally gave her readers. She was a soldier's wife who was ambivalent about the military, one who believed "that women who bring life into the world, and so value it more than men, will see that the peace is kept, that their children grow up to normal lives." She promised every girl a marriage, but described family after family in which fathers were inadequate, verging on non-existent. She married off each of her heroines in turn, but few of them were satisfied to be merely wives and mothers. The most engaging of her *girls* like Penny Parrish and Candy Kane needed careers to complement their marriages. Many of the full-time homemakers received dubious

rewards for their efforts. Carrol Houghton Parrish was the beneficiary of a nervous breakdown. Tippy Parrish Jordan was portrayed as a child-woman barely able to cope with life. Then there was the outstanding example of Lambert's affection for full-time wives and mothers, Alice Jordan Drayton, usually described as the sweetest and best of the five Jordan sisters. Alice was so uninteresting to her creator that Lambert killed her off in an automobile accident to further the plot of *A Bright Tomorrow*.

The "pink and perfect people" were not always happy in their "spun sugar world." And many of the Lambert fans of the 1950's were in the women's movement in the 1960's and the 1970's. Janet Lambert deserves to be remembered both for her personal accomplishments and for what she unintentionally said as well as for what she thought she said.

BOOKS BY JANET LAMBERT

CANDY KANE BOOKS

Candy Kane, 1943
Whoa Matilda, 1944
One for the Money, 1946

JORDAN FAMILY BOOKS

Just Jenifer, 1945
Friday's child, 1947
Confusion -- By Cupid, 1950
A Dream for Susan, 1954
Love Taps Gently, 1955
Myself and I, 1957
The Stars Hang High, 1960
Wedding Bells, 1961
A Bright Tomorrow, 1965

PENNY PARRISH BOOKS

Star Spangled Summer, 1941
Dreams of Glory, 1942
Glory Be!, 1943
Up Goes the Curtain, 1946
Practically Perfect, 1947
The Reluctant Heart, 1950

DRIA MEREDITH BOOKS

Star Dream, 1951
Summer for Seven, 1952
High Hurdles, 1955

CHRISTIE DRAYTON BOOKS

Where the Heart Is, 1948
Treasure Trouble, 1949

TIPPY PARRISH BOOKS

Miss Tippy, 1948
Little Miss Atlas, 1949
Miss America, 1951
Don't Cry Little Girl, 1952
Rainbow After Rain, 1953
Welcome Home, Mrs. Jordan, 1953
A Song in Their Hearts, 1956
Here's Marny, 1969

PARRI MACDONALD BOOKS

Introducing Parri, 1962
That's My Girl, 1964
Stagestruck Parri, 1966
My Davy, 1968

PATTY AND GINGER BOOKS

We're Going Steady, 1958
Boy Wanted, 1958
Spring Fever, 1960
Summer Madness, 1962
Extra Special, 1963
On Her Own, 1964

CINDA HOLLISTER BOOKS

Cinda, 1954
Fly Away Cinda, 1956
Big Deal, 1965
Triple Trouble, 1965
Love to Spare, 1967

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CAMPBELL FAMILY BOOKS

The Precious Days, 1957

For Each Other, 1959

Forever and Ever, 1961

Five's a Crowd, 1963

First of All, 1966

The Odd Ones, 1969

SUGAR BRADLEY BOOKS

Sweet as Sugar, 1967

Hi, Neighbor, 1968

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION ABOUT JANET LAMBERT

Current Biography Yearbook, 1954

Something About the Author, Vol. 25

III. GEORGETTE HEYER

Few individuals can claim to have invented a literary genre. Edgar Allan Poe is generally thought to have created the first detective stories. H. G. Wells and Jules Verne are certainly the fathers of science fiction. Included in this select company must be the British novelist Georgette Heyer, the progenitor of the peculiar literary sub-genre, the Regency romance. Although she took her cue from the novels of Jane Austen, Heyer's forty historical novels have spawned a cottage industry where currently more than 150 Regency romances are published each year, each title potentially selling 65,000 copies in the United States alone. Examining Georgette Heyer's achievement is made difficult by the fact that she granted no interviews during her lifetime, claiming "the readers would find all they needed to know about her in her books." (New York Times Biographical Edition, July, 1974) The main source of biographical data is *The Private World of Georgette Heyer* by Jane Aiken Hodge, herself a writer of Regency romances. Hodge had access to Heyer's correspondence and was able to interview both Heyer's son and surviving brother. Yet there is almost no knowledge of her early life, and Hodge, like the rest of Heyer's readers, was forced to look for the elusive author in her books. Who was this woman whose books had the capacity to inspire slavish imitation, whose readership continues to grow twenty years after she published her last novel, who finds champions among feminists and proponents of traditional roles for women, and who, according to her biographer, preferred the company of men although her readers were almost exclusively women?

Heyer, born in 1902, was the daughter of an English schoolmaster who abandoned the classroom when he discovered that he had a genius for fundraising. She had two younger brothers and a mother, who to all accounts, gave up a promising career in music to marry. Neither side of Heyer's family sprang from the gentility about whom she would write. Her paternal grandfather was a Russian immigrant. Her maternal grandparents were tugboat owners. What is known is that she was extremely close to

her father, relying on him as a mentor as well as a father. There exists no record of her formal education, but whatever it included-- probably a series of girls' private schools-- ceased by the time she was eighteen. University education was not an option for most women of her time. The outstanding women intellectuals of her day like Virginia Woolf and Rebecca West had no opportunity for the university. Like them, the lack of formal study was never a hindrance to Heyer's intellectual curiosity or her ability to research even the most obscure historical information.

Heyer began writing accidentally when she was seventeen. To entertain a sick brother, she invented an exciting story that so impressed her father, he urged her to write it down and submit it to a publisher. The novel *The Black Moth* was accepted and published in 1921 when its author was only nineteen. From then on it was a rare year that did not see the publication of one or two of her novels. In her lifetime she wrote 56 novels and a collection of short stories, ceasing to publish just two years before her death.

Her novels fall into four categories. There are the historical romances, the thrillers, four contemporary novels, and the serious historical novels. During her lifetime, Heyer attempted to suppress the contemporary novels. Now that they are again in print, it is easy to see why she disliked them. All written in her twenties, these novels lack the wit and style that mark the historical romances and thrillers. In addition, they may be the most blatantly autobiographical writing Heyer left. In *Helen*, a tiresome story about a rich girl whose attachment to her father is so intense that she is not free to marry until he dies, there is a heroine who writes novels, a heroine who is much more comfortable in the company of men than women. Helen, like so many Heyer heroines, is raised in a man's world and is appealing to men because she has not been spoiled by women. Critics commented, "Here one will find stretches of the trivial and the tedious... but one reads on in the hope that the author will yet redeem herself. This hope, however, is disappointed..." (*New York Times Book Review*, 5/27/28, p.22) "The argument... fails to

carry conviction; otherwise this is a story which contains some good work.” (*Times Literary Supplement*, 5/17/28, p.380)

In another early modern novel *Instead of the Thorns*, Heyer's heroine Elizabeth has been raised by her spinster aunt only to say and do what the world considers proper. This hypocritical suppression of her natural feelings leads to disaster when she marries a young novelist. Fleeing her marriage, Elizabeth spends a miserable year learning who she is and learning how to conduct herself in a marriage. She is given such advice as

There's a deal of give and take in marriage, and girls don't realize it...
The man takes and the woman gives. Leastways I've always found
it so...You see, dearie, a man's selfish. He can't help it; he don't have
to bear what we bear. At the best he's stupid when it comes to
understanding how we women feel. We don't really like him any
the less for that....So the woman's got to be unselfish. Stands to
reason she must be, or how would she fit in? A man doesn't fit

ever. He doesn't know how. (*Instead of the Thorns*, p. 273-4)

Returning to her marriage Elizabeth learns to tolerate Stephen's moods and tempers and adapt to his needs. The *New York Times* critic commented, "It is to be doubted, however, that feminists will approve of the culmination of this particular theme." (*New York Times*, 4/12/24, p.16) Yet Heyer's biographer suspects that the author's early writing about the nature of marriage is what set the tone for her own successful marriage. "More important, the early novels show that she had thought a great deal about marriage and the relationship between men and women. She may not have gone into marriage passionately; she was not a passionate woman. But she most certainly went into it meaning to make it work." (Hodge, p.23)

In *Pastel*, Heyer's third contemporary novel, Frances marries her reliable suitor Norman after her more attractive sister Evelyn marries Oliver, the man Frances fancies

she has been in love with. Again Heyer reworks the theme of adaptation to marriage. In this case, Frances learns to value what she has and stops envying Evelyn.

In real life Heyer married at 23, shortly after her father died. Her husband Ronald Rougier was a mining engineer and a sports enthusiast, temperamentally very much like the men Helen and Frances marry in the novels. She followed her husband to Tanganyika and Macedonia, but neither of these exotic locales ever appeared in her writing. Their marriage lasted almost 50 years, apparently in great harmony. Her writing supported his desire to study law and he finally qualified for the bar eventually achieving the level of Queen's Counsel towards the end of his career. In fact, at one point in her life, Heyer was supporting her entire family with her writing: a widowed mother, two brothers, a husband studying law, and her infant son. No heroine in any of her novels was so intrepid.

Although Heyer rejected these early works, they are examples of the theme she would pursue in virtually every novel--- that of the manners and morals of courtship and marriage. But what rang false in a modern setting seemed perfectly acceptable in a previous century. Yet there were some interesting parallels between England in the 1920's and England of the Regency. Both eras were a time of the loosening of rigid standards; both saw the upheaval of a great European war; both were dominated by an insouciant Prince of Wales whose flaunting of decorum set the style of behavior. The difference was that during the Regency everyone knew his or her place. Class was a rigid barrier that few would dare to transgress. In the few novels where a *misalliance* occurs, only the offspring are acceptable in polite society, provided, of course, that they (the offspring) have been gently educated. So in leaving her own era for another, Heyer chose one similar in many respects to her own, but one where rules applied.

While she may not have succeeded with novels in a contemporary setting, she was in complete control of the historical genre. Four early novels have pre-eighteenth century settings. None of them are entirely successful, but all of them display her

story-telling ability. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, however, Georgette Heyer was at home. She mastered every nuance of the slang, the furniture, the dress, the historical and political events, the manners, the morals, the gossip, the food. In short, she got it right. She created a perfect world for herself and her readers by traveling back a hundred to a hundred and fifty years, ignoring the ugliness of that time and making life delightful.

The historicals change in character over time. Her earliest novels were swashbucklers with male protagonists; there was less emphasis on courtship and more on derring-do. In *The Black Moth*, Heyer's first novel, Jack Carstares the hero is an attractive and honorable nobleman. Falsely accused of cheating at cards, Jack decides to be a highwayman for the sport of it, particularly since he is no longer received in polite society. Jack rescues Diana, a damsel about to be abducted by the evil Duke of Andover. After many adventures, his name is cleared, and Jack, now an Earl, marries Diana. It is assumed that they live happily ever after. In *These Old Shades*, the book that made her reputation in historical romance and was published when Heyer was only 24, the evil Duke becomes the hero (albeit with a name change - he is now the Duke of Avon). Avon rescues Leon, an engaging French urchin, and makes him his page, only to discover that Leon is in reality Leonie, the daughter of a noble French family who, in a dastardly plot to get a male heir, abandoned her at birth. Avon restores Leonie to her rightful place in society, destroys his enemy, Leonie's wicked father, and, need it be said, marries her in the end. Yet even in these earliest novels the seeds of the comedy of manners were present. From the very beginning, Heyer knew whom her cast of characters was, and for over fifty years she refined them. She may have been accused of using stock characters over and over, but rather she manipulated her actors in a kind of *commedia dell'arte* where each actor plays the same role with endless variations and subtle changes. In the later novels there were more women protagonists, and even when women were not the focal point of the plot,

her heroines tended to be strong competent females, not shrinking ingenues. As time went by the novels became witty comedies of manners with less flamboyant action or melodramatic plotting in which the main object of her plot was simply the arrangement of marriages to appropriate parties.

Who were her cast of characters? There were two essential types of heroes whom she called Mark I and Mark II. Mark I heroes were descended from Jane Eyre's Mr. Rochester. They were usually dark, dissipated, dangerous, and generally had soiled reputations. The Duke of Avon (Andover) was her prototype. Mark II heroes were strong and honorable sportsmen and soldiers with reputations for fair play and integrity. In general, Mark II heroes were likely to be fair-haired. Jack Carstares was clearly the first Mark II hero. Then there were the feckless youths, generally appearing as someone's troublesome brother. Avon's brother Rupert (Andrew in *The Black Moth*) is the first of these. Rupert drinks too much, is always in debt due to gambling and women, has two skills: avoiding paying his bills and borrowing money. Yet in general, the feckless youth proved courageous and steadfast when a real crisis arose. In *These Old Shades*, Rupert rescues Leonie when her father abducts her. There were also the earnest suitors: priggish gentlemen who never understood that their interests in particular heroines were not reciprocated. While the priggish suitor was lovingly refined throughout the novels, the incompletely developed character already appears in *The Black Moth* in the form of Squire Bettison, Diana's suitor. There were dangerous dandies, whose lisps and affected manners often hid intelligence and treachery. And of course there was an endless stream of men-about-town: Corinthians, tulips, court-cards, macaronis, Captain Sharps, all of whom knew the rules of society and more or less played by them.

The heroines were brave, intelligent, resourceful women. Diana calmly dines with the Duke although she knows he is about to ravish her. Leonie throws coffee on her father during her abduction and manages to escape him when a carriage wheel breaks.

In the earlier novels, many of them like Leonie masqueraded as boys and had an androgynous quality about them. All of them had one feature in common, a lively sense of humor. There were two kinds of beautiful ingenues in Heyer's novels. Some were headstrong and selfish, needing a strong hand; others were empty-headed and spiritless. The Duke's sister Lucinda (Fanny in *These Old Shades*) was Heyer's first willful ingenue. The pretty ingenue was usually there to complicate life for the real heroine, but she, too, was usually rewarded with an appropriate husband in the end. Heyer also regularly included a silly woman in her novels. The silly woman was usually an aunt or companion, as in *These Old Shades* where the reader meets Harriet, a cousin of Avon's who is Leonie's chaperone. Cousin Harriet, like her better-developed successors, chatters endlessly and meaninglessly and has hysterics when a cool head is needed. Hodge conjectures that the silly woman may have been modeled upon Heyer's own mother. But to counteract the silly woman was the wise older woman, who occasionally, but not always was the hero or heroine's mother. She makes her first appearance in *The Black Moth* as Diana's Aunt Betty and may have been modeled upon Heyer's aunts.

While it can be said that Georgette Heyer repeated herself, there was always something fresh in each novel. However, there were groups of novels whose plots were uncomfortably alike. *The Convenient Marriage* and *April Lady* both deal with marriages of very young girls to men almost twice their age. In each case the bride believes the marriage to be one of convenience; her husband, on the other hand, is besotted with his child bride, but hasn't expressed his true feelings to his wife. The wife is jealous of a mistress, who is, in actuality, a former mistress. Each wife also has a brother of the feckless youth variety who complicates communication between the couple. Each novel describes their eventual understanding of mutual love. *Black Sheep*, *A Lady of Quality*, and *Venetia* all deal with a romance between a lady of unimpeachable virtue with a rake -- a Mark I hero of questionable virtue and

disreputable character. *The Foundling*, *Sprig Muslin*, and *Charity Girl* all focus on the problem of an honorable man, a Mark II hero who finds himself responsible for a childish ingenue, a situation which complicates the hero's own plans for marriage. There are echoes of this plot in such early works as *The Masqueraders* and *The Talisman Ring*.

The worst examples of character and plot reuse occur in the short stories. Heyer knew that the short story was not her *forte*. However, from time to time she was pressured into writing them for women's magazines, largely because she was in need of the income. In the short story she had no time to develop her characters or create the witty *denouements* for which she was known. Instead, her short stories read like plot outlines for her novels, and in fact, they are embarrassingly just that. In 1960 the stories were published as a collection *Pistols for Two*. Here are a few examples of how she stole from herself: In "Bath Miss" a hero who has unhappily become betrothed to please his family, meets a young girl more to his liking and eventually breaks his engagement to marry the girl he loves. The same plot exists in *The Corinthian*. In "Hazard", a man too drunk to know what he is doing runs off with a woman only to fall in love with her -- also part of the plot of *The Corinthian*. In "Snowdrift" a young man promises to save his childhood friend from a repulsive marriage by eloping with her although they don't love each other. The man she doesn't wish to marry intervenes and the heroine eventually falls in love with one she thought she loathed. This is also the plot of *Sylvester or the Wicked Uncle*. "A Clandestine Affair" describes the eventual marriage of a couple whose betrothal was broken many years before. This mirrors the plot of *Bath Tangle*. If she had no scruples about reusing her plots, it is small wonder that a legion of Regency Romance authors has had no scruples about plagiarizing Heyer.

According to Hodge, Heyer first discovered that she was being plagiarized in 1950. She contacted the author, noting the instances of plot and character theft, and for a

while the imitations ceased. However, time and again, Heyer was made aware of novels that combined characters and elements of her works; and while she dutifully consulted legal counsel and her own publishers, she never brought suit against the offending authors because of her own innate desire for privacy. A messy lawsuit would bring her to the attention of the world. This was what she so assiduously avoided throughout her entire publishing career.

Jane Austen was the first author of Regency romances. Jane Austen, however, had the advantage of living during the Regency. She wrote about the manners and morals of her time, creating universalities out of the intimacies of domestic life. Heyer was a fan of Austen and set her most successful novels during the Regency. She studied Austen's letters, and indeed, virtually every primary source of the period -- letters, diaries, newspapers, books, magazines, histories. Hodge describes Heyer's files as being as extensive as any in a major research library. While Heyer immersed herself in the Regency, she did not borrow either Austen's characters or plots, except, of course, the general concept of courtship and marriage as the basis of a novel. Heyer's imitators, on the other hand, borrow everything imaginable. Her language is their language. If she used a phrase like "drawing his cork" (giving someone a bloody nose) that phrase pops up in every other author's novels. In *Frederica* a sick child is given a restorative pork jelly. This pork jelly regularly turns up as a cure-all whenever anyone is sick in her imitators' novels.

In five novels, all by different authors, published within the last fifteen years, there are varying degrees of imitation. *The Double Wager* by Mary Balough describes a marriage between an a delightful young girl and a much older man. Although it is a love match, neither believes the other loves him/her and their relationship is complicated by the plotting of the gentleman's jealous heir and jealous ex-mistress. This is very much the plot of Heyer's *Convenient Marriage*. In *A Scandalous Publication* by Sandra Heath, the heroine has written a book that defames the Mark I

hero she formerly detested but now loves. She tries without success to squelch the publication which estranges her from the hero, but in the end they make up their misunderstandings. Heyer's *Sylvester* is remarkably similar. In *Moonlight Veil* by Janis Laden, the heroine is always championing underdogs, particularly climbing boys-- young boys forced by chimney sweeps to climb up chimneys in order to clean them. The same is true of Heyer's *Arabella*. In *Lord Harry's Folly* by Catherine Coulter one sibling masquerades as another in order to retrieve the family's fortunes. The same could be said for Heyer's *False Colours*. In Carola Dunn's *Lavender Lady*, a gallant young woman struggles to raise a family of charming siblings that strongly resemble Frederica's brothers and sisters in *Frederica*.

One of America's experts on Regency fiction, Melinda Helfer of *Romantic Times*, thinks that there is very little real plagiarism. Her feeling, first of all, is that all romance novels have the same basic plot anyway. She suggests that authors who grew up reading Heyer over and over have simply digested her work to the point that many of her stylistic tricks, plots, and stock characters have simply become part of the authors' psyches. In other words, the works of Georgette Heyer have become the basic vocabulary of her imitators. Helfer denies that there is a formula publishers require for their standard Regency, but she admits that the general length for a novel published by New American Library is 220 pages and that sensuality in the NAL Regencies is limited to only that which is consistent with the novel's plot. In other words, explicit sexual description is not appropriate. Regencies are not bodice-rippers in which the heroine continually is ravished --- in exquisite detail--- by the hero. Although some publishers have used the Regency period for their bodice-ripping historicals replete with soft-core pornography, a true Regency will include little more than a few passionate kisses or some not very steamy scenes in the marriage bed. Very few Regency authors allow their heroines to indulge in premarital or extra-marital sex. Heyer's heroines were never unchaste.

The readers of the contemporary Regencies are, according to Helfer, the most intelligent readers of romance fiction. They are required to master a vocabulary of period slang, recognize historical figures, landmarks, and events of the era, and she claims that the Regencies are the best written of all the historical romance genres. It is true that the road to today's Regency leads from Austen through Heyer, but it is puzzling to understand why many presumably educated women are so taken with the period and the novels of Georgette Heyer that they are willing to read variations on her themes over and over and over.

One interesting fact about Heyer is that she has attracted a feminist readership as well as traditional devotees of the romance genre. Certainly her view of a woman's role in marriage, as evidenced by the advice she gave Elizabeth in *Instead of the Thorns* was far from feminist. This attitude did not change over the years. In *Venetia*, written 42 years later, a wise older woman, Lady Denny, counsels Venetia about the nature of men:

"Men, my love, are different from us," she had said once, "even the best of them! I tell you this because I hold it to be very wrong to rear girls in the belief that the face men show to females they respect is their only one. I daresay if we were to see them watching some horrid, vulgar prize-fight, or in the company with women of a certain class, we shouldn't recognize our own husbands and brothers. I am very sure we should think them disgusting! Which, in some ways, they *are*, only it would be unjust to blame them for what they can't help. One ought to be thankful that any affairs they might have... don't change their *true* affection in the least. Indeed I fancy affection plays no part in such adventures. So odd! -- for we you know could scarcely indulge in them with no more effect on our lives than if we had been choosing a new hat. But so it is with men! Which is why it has been *most* truly said that while your husband continues to show you tenderness you have no cause for complaint, and would be zany to fall into despair only because of what to him was a mere peccadillo.

(*Venetia*, p.61)

After forty happy years of marriage, Heyer had not changed her view of who was the giver and who, the taker in a marital relationship. And although she described more than one hundred marriages where passion ruled, her personal view of a successful marriage was probably best described in *A Civil Contract*, a novel where Adam, in order to save his patrimony, must marry Jenny, a wealthy merchant's daughter, rather than Julia, the ethereal, self-centered beauty he has passionately loved. Towards the end of the book Adam comes to realize that he may have been fortunate to escape the turbulent Julia, that Jenny's good sense and restfulness may be better qualities in a long term relationship:

Yet, after all, Jenny thought that she had been granted more that she had hoped for when she had married him. He did love her: differently, but perhaps more enduringly; and he had grown to depend on her. She thought that they would have many years of quiet contentment: never reaching the heights, but living together in comfort and deepening friendship.

(*A Civil Contract*, p. 393)

There is another way to look at Heyer's view of men. She seemed to think that most men were captives of their baser natures, likely to engage in extra-marital affairs and unlikely to make as many accommodations to marriage as their wives. On the other hand, the heroes of her novels were faithful to their wives. Many like the Duke of Avon in *These Old Shades* or Lord Damerel in *Venetia* had unspeakably disreputable pasts, but definitely reformed once they fell in love and married. And while she tolerated the foibles of men, she didn't condone them. It was just assumed that men didn't have the character to behave as well as women.

Her women were magnificent. The most appealing of them were generally reared in a world of men. Prudence in *The Masqueraders* has, with her younger brother Robin, spent her life following their disreputable father through Europe, often dressed as a boy to protect her virtue. In the novel Prudence and Robin have exchanged identities to avoid capture for their roles in a recent rebellion. Sir Anthony Fanshawe

realizes the imposture, and falls in love with Prudence because of her fearlessness. She has, by that time, rescued a young heiress who was being abducted by a fortune hunter, outgambled several card sharps who were attempting to fleece her, fought off an attack by street ruffians, and agreed to fight a duel with a more skilled swordsman. When Prudence questions Anthony's admiration, he explains the reasons for his love, "Two will suffice. I have never seen you betray fear; I have never seen you lose your head. I don't believe you've done so." (*The Masqueraders*, p.203) He doesn't love her because she's beautiful or feminine, but because she's courageous and competent.

Sophy Stanton-Lacy in *The Grand Sophy* is another of Heyer's masterful women. Raised by her widowed father whose diplomatic responsibilities have taken him and Sophy all over Europe, she is thrust upon her aunt's large and troubled family when her father is sent to Brazil. Sophy is a manager of other people's affairs. So when she sees that her cousin Cecilia's infatuation for a poet is unrealistic, she encourages the relationship, knowing Cecilia will eventually realize that life with an impractical, impoverished poet will be miserable and return to her more satisfactory suitor. When she realizes that her cousin Hubert is in debt to a moneylender, Sophy, pistol in hand, faces down the sinister man to retrieve Hubert's IOU's and signet ring. When yet another cousin Amabel becomes seriously ill, Sophy, scornful of the threat of infection, gives up all her social engagements to nurse the child. Sophy is contrasted to her cousin Charles' fiancée Eugenia Wraxton. Eugenia refuses to enter the house while Amabel is infectious. Eugenia repeats Charles' confidences to Sophy. Eugenia believes that Hubert should be scolded rather than rescued from his entanglement with moneylenders. Hodge points out that Eugenia "errs... by carrying tales and admitting that she is prepared to betray a confidence in a good cause.....this is a failure of moral humanity." (Hodge, p.84). Sophy turns the feminine ideal upside down in a scene where, when she is quarreling with Charles, she begins to cry.

Sophy looked at him. Under his amazed and horrified gaze large tears slowly welled over her eyelids and rolled down her cheeks. She did not sniff, or gulp,

or even sob; merely she allowed her tears to gather and fall.

"Sophy!" ejaculated Mr. Rivenhall, visibly shaken. He took an involuntary step towards her, checked himself, and said rather disjointedly: "Pray do not! I did not mean --- I had no intention --- You know how it is with me! I say more than I mean, when --- For God's sake do not cry!"

"Oh do not stop me!" begged Sophy, "Sir Horace says it is my *only* accomplishment."

Mr. Rivenhall glared at her. "*What?*"

"A very few persons are able to do it," Sophy assured him. "I discovered it by the veriest accident when I was only seven years old. Sir Horace said I should cultivate it, for I should find it most useful.

(*The Grand Sophy*, p. 221-222)

Having respect for the conventions of traditional womanhood, Heyer could afford to overturn them. Women like Sophy would never resort to tears to get their way. Sophy, of course, wins Charles in the end, not because she is beautiful and in need of protection, but because she is resourceful, courageous, and kind.

Again and again, what allowed the heroine to succeed was not great beauty, but courage, kindness, intelligence, and a sense of humor. Deb Grantham in *Faro's Daughter* is a notable beauty, but she wins Max Ravenscar because she is willing to play fair even if it means losing the game. Sarah Thane in *The Talisman Ring* first attracts Sir Tristram Shields because of her sense of humor. Frederica wins her Lord because of her intelligence and competence. While none of these heroines are unattractive, they are often eclipsed by a more beautiful ingenue whose beauty is only exceeded either by her brainlessness or her selfishness. A true hero recognizes the value of a less beautiful but more intelligent mate. A few of the heroines are even described as being rather plain: Jenny of *A Civil Contract*, Hester of *Sprig Muslin*, Drusilla of *The Quiet Gentleman*, and Phoebe of *Sylvester* are unremarkable. But all of them have courage, common sense, and intelligence.

Venetia is one of Heyer's finest books. It is a novel with virtually no action --- just the standard boy meets girl, boy loves girl, boy loses girl, boy and girl are reunited. In this instance, the girl is Venetia Lanyon, who since her father's death, has been

managing the family estates and caring for her scholarly younger brother Aubrey while Conway, her feckless brother enjoys himself serving with the Army of Occupation in France. Despite the fact that she is already twenty-five, Venetia has never been presented in society because her father was a recluse. Therefore, although she is exquisitely beautiful, Venetia has only two suitors, both from the immediate neighborhood. One suitor, Oswald Denny, is a nineteen-year-old romantic modeling himself on Lord Byron; the other, Edward Yardley, is a stolid young landowner, who is one of the most elegantly characterized of all Heyer's priggish gentlemen.

No one could have described him as an impatient lover. Venetia was the magnet which drew him to Undershaw, but it was four years before he declared himself, and she could almost have believed then that he did it against his better judgment. She had no hesitation in declining his offer.... but Edward having at last made up his mind, was as determined as he was confident. He was not at all cast down by her refusal; he ascribed it variously to shyness, maiden modesty, surprise, and even devotion to her widowed father... and began from that day to develop a possessive manner towards her which provoked her very frequently to run directly counter to his advice, and to say whatever occurred to her as being most likely to shock him. It did not answer. His disapproval was often patent, but it was softened by indulgence. Her liveliness fascinated him, and he did not doubt his ability to mould her (once she was his own) to his complete liking.

(*Venetia*, p. 21-22)

Into the neighborhood, and thus into Venetia's life, comes the wicked Lord Damerel. ...he bore himself with a faint suggestion of swashbuckling arrogance. As he advanced upon her Venetia perceived that he was dark, his countenance lean and rather swarthy, marked with lines of dissipation. A smile was curling his lips, but Venetia thought she had never seen eyes so cynically bored.

(*Venetia*, p.27)

Here is the epitome of the Mark I hero. As it turns out Damerel fell in love and eloped with a married woman when he was a very young man. His family disowned him, the lady played him false, and disillusioned with life and love, he embarked on a life of dissolute pleasure. The courtship between Venetia and Damerel is played out against

an autumn landscape and the book is somewhat longer than most, allowing Heyer to flesh out each character in loving detail. This is what makes the novel so fine. Because the plot is not cluttered with smugglers, or French spies, *Venetia* is a glowing portrait of life in the Regency. The thrust of the plot turns solely on what constitutes social ruin and what is appropriate behavior. Everyone, including Damerel, tries to protect Venetia from what society perceives as a disastrous marriage, so in order to achieve happiness, she must take charge. Since Venetia has been in charge all her life, she eventually devises a scheme that will force Damerel to renounce his noble principles in favor of their mutual happiness. Again it is the Heyer heroine who has the resolution to set things right. She, not the hero, is the white knight.

Venetia was the antithesis of the novel Heyer really wanted to write. Although it is one of her most perfect creations because she used all of her knowledge of the period to create a totally authentic setting for a devastating examination of what was proper in society, the author's real desire was to write histories in the form of novels. Several of her novels are more properly histories with a modicum of romance attached. The most successful of these is *An Infamous Army*, which chronicles the Battle of Waterloo, called "...the best novel about the Battle of Waterloo since Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*." (*Time*, 2-21-64, p. 100) According to Hodge, Heyer's description of Waterloo has even been used at Sandhurst, Britain's foremost military college. Heyer, her family and her publisher all considered this her finest novel. Certainly the amount of research was prodigious. In addition, she created a fictional couple whose romance was as tempestuous as the battle and whose lineage was found in previous novels. Lady Barbara Childe is the granddaughter of the protagonists of *The Devil's Cub* and the great granddaughter of Leonie and the Duke of Avon of *These Old Shades*. She is every bit as outrageous and her grandfather and great grandfather were, flirting with and ensnaring as many men as she can and flouting convention whenever she is able - -- a feminine version of the Mark I hero. Colonel Charles Audley is an old friend from

Regency Buck where he assisted in the romance between his brother Lord Worth and the heiress Judith Taverner who was Worth's ward. Charles, now on Wellington's staff, is definitely a Mark II hero. Despite immediate and mutual recognition of love, Bab's willfulness causes them to separate. When they are reunited at the end of the novel, Charles has lost an arm in battle, Bab has demonstrated her gallantry, nursing the wounded, and neither of them has any illusions about the other. Just as Heyer portrayed the realistic horrors of battle, the romance in *An Infamous Army* stripped away the illusions of romance.

In *The Spanish Bride*, Heyer chronicled the romance of an historical couple Juana and Harry Smith. Smith, who wrote an autobiography upon which Heyer based her novel, was a captain in the British army during the Peninsular Wars with Napoleon. After the siege of Badajos, one of the Spanish survivors was Juana de Leon, a fourteen-year-old aristocrat newly arrived from her convent school. Smith saw her emerge from the ruins of the city and married her. Juana remained with Harry through most of the war. Heyer's novel about this unconventional couple is her opportunity to write about the Napoleonic Wars on the Iberian Peninsula. As in *An Infamous Army*, her unsentimental and very accurate portrayal of war was mirrored by her unsentimental portrayal of the rigors of married life and the amount of adjustment and compromise that was needed to make a relationship.

Her other historicals were less successful. *The Great Escape*, about the flight from England of Charles II, had neither the right combination of romantic elements nor the Regency setting of which Heyer was mistress. *The Conqueror*, about the courtship of William the Conqueror and Matilda of Flanders, lacked the fire of other novels. *The Great Roxhythe* set in the reign of Charles I was dismal. Saddest was *My Lord John*, published posthumously. In 1948 she began the work on what she referred to as "a real book." (Hodge, p. 72) She was intrigued with the medieval period of the War of the Roses and took as her hero John of Bedford, the third son of Henry IV. Work on this

novel continued until her death. She was never able to complete it because her fans and frequent problems with taxes compelled her to write another and yet another Regency. Her husband, in a preface to the book, says,

The historian, A. J. Froude, in his famous purple passage declared that it was not possible for us to grasp the medieval mind. This is probably true. But it may be that, in this work, Georgette Heyer has come closer to bridging the gap that anyone else has done.

(*My Lord John*, p. viii)

Unfortunately, although she may have almost bridged the aforementioned gap, her wit, her ironic view of society, her perfectly realized characters were all in the Regency. *My Lord John* is a plodding work that never engages the reader as did her frivolous comedies of manners. While Heyer may have yearned for the respectability of an historical novel, it was her romances that will endure.

The twelve books that Heyer called thrillers also continue to find a readership. As a professional writer, Heyer looked at novels of detection and recognized a genre in which she might also be successful. The thrillers, more properly detective novels, were a joint effort between Heyer and her husband. Ronald developed the plots and figured out how the murder might have been committed; Georgette wrote the books, fleshing in the characters and background. For a number of years, beginning in 1932, she published one historical romance and one thriller a year. The thrillers never sold as well as the romances, but neither did they do badly. They were all notable for Heyer's witty dialogue and the inevitable romance between two of the main characters. Amusingly, several of the mysteries were solved by dashing young barristers, very possibly modeled on her husband. Some critics strongly praised her work, most notably Jacques Barzun in his *Catalogue of Crime*, but the opinion of Earl F. Bargainnier writing in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography* is closer to the truth:

When she wrote her mysteries, she did not abandon the romantic formulas she had developed from Austen. These and her comedy are her only distinctive additions to the British detective novel;

otherwise her work is conventional in structure, setting, characters, style, and mysteries to be solved.

(*Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 77, p. 158)

There is no doubt the best of the thrillers are funny. In *Death in the Stocks*, the repartee between the irreverent Vereckers, a brother and sister who are both suspects in the murder of their half-brother, is as witty as any Heyer ever wrote. The posturing of Vicky Fanshawe, a young woman who views life as a stage on which she can play a different role complete with change of costume every three or four hours, in *No Wind of Blame* is as hilarious as the portrayal is acute. Then there is the Bible quoting Patrolman Glass in *A Blunt Instrument* who makes life difficult for the Scotland Yard inspectors.

The thrillers were well reviewed when they were published. About *Death in the Stocks* it was said "A number one yarn, not so much for the mystery in it as for the delightfully mad characters..." (*New York Times*, 9-8-35, p. 27) "...an excellent example of what can be achieved when the commonplace material of detective fiction is worked up by an experienced novelist....as refreshing as it is rare in the ordinary mystery story." (*Times Literary Supplement*, 4-18-35, p. 256) About *A Blunt Instrument*, "The pleasure of reading her spirited dialogue and meeting her enterprising characters is not affected by an early guess at the solution." (*New Statesman and Nation*, 6-25-38, p. 1078.) Today they are still read for the same reasons.

The habit of solving crimes even emerged in a number of the Regencies. In *The Talisman Ring* the solution to a murder and theft is essential to the happiness of the protagonists. In *The Corinthian* the theft of an heirloom necklace and the resultant murder, while not essential to the plot, certainly lend it spice. In *The Reluctant Widow*, a French spy is unmasked. In *The Quiet Gentleman* someone is trying to murder the Earl of St. Erth. So the author was able to put to good use her experience in detective fiction, using it to enrich the plots of her better work.

The language of Regency England was the hallmark of Heyer's work. Not all critics appreciated her special knowledge. "The reader can just skip over the chunks of period slang she has forced into the dialogue and not miss a thing." (*New Yorker*, 9-4-54, p. 76) "...it sometimes seems that the author has mastered dictionary of the era and trots out all of it,..." (*New York Times Book Review*, 9-4-55, p.10). Her readers, however, not only loved but also adopted the language as their own. It, of course, appears in large, but not always necessary or appropriately used, chunks in her imitators' books.

The author was an indefatigable researcher. Hodge describes Heyer's vocabulary files where under the heading of woman, for example, there would be a list of complimentary and pejorative terms that Heyer had culled from the letters, diaries, novels, newspapers, and histories of the day. In *The Nonesuch* an argument between two cousins is as follows:

"Who gets you out of sponging-houses? Who saved you from the devil's own mess, not a month ago? I know to what tune you were bit at that hell in Pall Mall!...The Sharps tried on the grand mace with you, didn't they? Lord, it was all hollow for them! You were *born* a bleater!"
(*The Nonesuch*, p. 4)

In *The Quiet Gentleman* the grooms in the stable regard their new Lord:

He was plainly not a neck-or-nothing blood of the Fancy, like his half-brother; he was a quiet gentleman like his cousin, who was a very good rider to the hounds; and if the team of lengthy short-legged bits of blood-and-bone he had brought to Stanyon had been of his own choosing, he knew one end of horse from another.it seemed likely that he would cut of Leicestershire. (*The Quiet Gentleman*, p. 28)

The hero of *Friday's Child* says, "Lord, I'd give a monkey to have seen Gil's phiz when you asked him if he had an opera-dancer?" (*Friday's Child*, p.167) Regency fans would have no difficulty understanding that the cousin in *The Nonesuch* had been gambling, had been fleeced by card sharks, lost a great deal of money, and was unable to pay his

debts. The new Lord in *The Quiet Gentleman* was not a reckless rider like his half-brother, but had purchased a very good team of horses and would probably not embarrass himself at the hunt. The speaker in *Friday's Child* would have given a large sum of money to see his friend's face when he was asked in public whether or not he kept a mistress. Fans knew that women weren't pregnant, they were "increasing". Men never got drunk; they were "foxed" or "jug-bitten." Thieves didn't rob houses; they "milled kens." Women didn't have hysterics; they "enacted Cheltenham tragedies." And as one reviewer said, "It is no small feat to make Regency London come to life, and to make its characters speak and act as did the people of that time and place..." (*Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10-22-50, p. 4)

Heyer never received great critical acclaim. She was, however, "her own sternest critic" according to her son in the preface to *Simon the Coldheart*, a book which was reissued after her death because she had suppressed its republication during her lifetime. No critic called her work great; but even during her lifetime there was critical recognition of those special qualities that raised her work above the run-of-mill escape literature. "There is more to this than superb entertainment, for Miss Heyer's art is a facile and limber one." (*Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10-22-50, p. 4)

Georgette Heyer had turned what otherwise could be dismissed as a long series of sugary historical romances into a body of work that will probably be consulted by future scholars as the most detailed and accurate portrait of Regency life anywhere....As with the late William Faulkner, you don't buy a book, you buy a world. If it suits you, you settle down forever. (*Time*, 2-21-64, p.100)

"No one creates characters so entirely without anachronisms yet so convincingly flesh and blood." (*Saturday Review of Literature*, 12-16-50, p. 37) The praise is general throughout most of the reviews.

There were, of course, detractors as well. A reviewer said of *The Quiet Gentleman*, "I find myself unable to do more than praise it with faint damns." (*Saturday Review*, 5-22-52, p. 19.) Of *Arabella* it was said

...no sign of the rough and sordid London of Swift and Defoe is allowed to intrude. Nor is there the least sign of the robustness and vitality that made those masters' creations come to life.... Arabella and the Nonesuch are stereotypes from *The Ladies Monthly Museum*....

(*New York Times*, 6-19-49, p. 40)

Part of this last criticism has validity. Heyer was writing about a period in British history that saw great economic depression. Four hundred thousand men were out of work, many of them demobilized soldiers who no longer had wars to fight once Napoleon was finally defeated. In 1815, Parliament passed the Corn Law which may have been good for landlords, but caused the price of bread to rise for the poor. While most of the highwaymen in Heyer novels were portrayed as colorful characters, gaily plying their trade, the reality was much worse. Men were desperate, their families were starving, and robbery was often the only alternative to death, but conviction for robbery also led to death. Again, the Regency period had echoes in the author's own time. The Great Depression, unemployment, the General Strike of 1926, these were the events she was trying to ignore. And ignore them she did, in her novels. In *Arabella* a grimy climbing boy makes a brief appearance, and Arabella's brother spends an uncomfortable week or so in a low tavern. Kitten in *Friday's Child* rescues a starving woman who has been seduced and abandoned by the novel's villain. Ben in *The Toll Gate* is terrified by the thought that if his father never returns, he will become a ward of the parish, and Waldo Hawkridge of *The Nonesuch* cares enough about the poor to establish orphanages throughout the country. But poverty and realism didn't interest Heyer. She wanted to create a world where societal evils could be ignored, where her characters could be insulated from anything ugly, where what were important were breeding, education, and good manners. This is, in great part, one of the most attractive features of her fiction. Readers knew that poverty, hunger, disease-- in short, all social problems had no place in a Heyer novel. This was escape at its most elegant.

What did Georgette Heyer accomplish? She recreated the upper class world of Regency England so meticulously that scholars consult her work. She wrote romances in which women were valued for their wits, their character, and their sense of humor rather than for mere beauty. She made people laugh with her wit and irony and her insanely funny denouements. She invented a literary genre that has generated a small army of imitators and a steady source of income in the publishing world. She made life beautiful and she gave women hope.

In an article in *Library Journal* entitled "Unrestricted Body Parts and Predictable Bliss," Mary Chelton lists the four main reasons that romances appeal to readers: predictability, sexual fantasy, humor, and escape. (*Library Journal*, 7-91, p.44) Leaving aside the sexual fantasy, Heyer's novels are right on target. The fact that they are literate and informed is only icing on the cake. No one, even Georgette Heyer fans, reads a romance to learn Wellington's tactics at the Battle of Waterloo or about Great Britain's attempt to stamp out smuggling in the nineteenth century. And there is no shame in escape. People who watch 5-7 hours of television each night are rarely called upon to justify their activity. Women who read romances are often ridiculed. While the bulk of romance novels will be as ephemeral as the poor quality paper upon which they are printed, Georgette Heyer will continue to entertain, and incidentally, inform readers for years to come. *The Black Moth*, now 71 years old, is still delighting readers and gaining Heyer new fans. In a bookstore in Sydney, Australia, in 1992, there were seven Heyer titles on the shelf. In a bookstore in Kansas in the same month, there were twelve titles available. Virtually every book she wrote is still in print, even those she tried to suppress. This is indeed a considerable feat for a self-taught historian whose education stopped at the age of eighteen, and who for many years wrote to enable her husband and brothers to complete their educations. As much the heroine as any of her fictional ladies, Georgette Heyer has written fiction that endures.

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Contemporary Novels

Bath Tangle, 1955

Sprig Muslin, 1956

Instead of the Thorns, 1923

April Lady, 1957

Helen, 1928

Sylvester: or the Wicked Uncle, 1957

Pastel, 1929

Venetia, 1958

Barren Corn, 1930

The Unknown Ajax, 1959

A Civil Contract, 1961

Historical Romances and Historicals

The Nonesuch, 1962

False Colours, 1963

The Black Moth, 1921

Frederica, 1965

Powder and Patch, 1923

Black Sheep, 1966

The Great Roxhythe, 1923

Cousin Kate, 1968

Simon the Coldheart, 1925

Charity Girl, 1970

These Old Shades, 1926

Lady of Quality, 1972

The Masqueraders, 1928

My Lord John, 1975

Beauvallet, 1929

The Conqueror, 1931

Thrillers

Devil's Cub, 1932

The Convenient Marriage, 1934

Footsteps in the Dark, 1932

Regency Buck, 1935

Why Shoot a Butler, 1933

The Talisman Ring, 1936

The Unfinished Clue, 1934

An Infamous Army, 1937

Death in the Stocks, 1935

Royal Escape, 1938

Behold, Here's the Poison, 1936

The Spanish Bride, 1940

They Found Him Dead, 1937

The Corinthian, 1940
A Blunt Instrument, 1938
Faro's Daughter, 1941
No Wind of Blame, 1939
Friday's Child, 1944
Envious Casca, 1941
The Reluctant Widow, 1946
Penhallow, 1942
The Foundling, 1948
Duplicate Death, 1951
Arabella, 1949
Detection Unlimited, 1953
The Grand Sophy, 1950
The Quiet Gentleman, 1951
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IV. FRANCES PARKINSON KEYES

Frances Parkinson Keyes began writing at the age of seven. Her first efforts included a family Christmas pageant and some rabidly patriotic verse that was published in a local Vermont newspaper at the time of the Spanish-American War. Although her mother and later her husband both discouraged her writing, Keyes persisted. As a child, she hid her manuscripts beneath her underclothing in a bureau drawer. As a wife, she created a hideaway in an attic where no one would know that she continued to write. Finally at the age of thirty-four, Frances Parkinson Keyes published her first novel. She used her first earnings to pay off several medical bills and purchase a new spring outfit. It took another seventeen years to see a novel of hers on the best seller list. She was then forty-one. By the time she died in 1970, a few days short of her eighty-fifth birthday, she had published fifty books of fiction and non-fiction; seen her books translated into most of the world's languages, sold more than fifty million copies of her novels, and been a fixture on the best seller list for more

than thirty years. Few critics liked her books. Her fans adored her. Who was she and what was the appeal of her novels to so many women?

Frances Parkinson Wheeler was born in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 1885, the only daughter of John Henry Wheeler, a transplanted New Englander who was a professor of Greek at the University of Virginia, and Louise Johnson Underhill Wheeler, a widowed New York socialite with roots in New England. When the little girl was two, her father died of a heart attack. Louise Wheeler, now twice a widow, soon married one of her husband's best friends. It was unheard of for women in the late nineteenth century to marry three times. Men, who saw so many wives die in childbirth, could marry as many times as they were widowed, but women were considered "fast" if they were so easily consoled. Even more shocking, in a few years Louise Wheeler decided that she had made a mistake and separated from her third husband, taking Frances on a year-long trip to Europe. The separation eventually ended in divorce, effectively ostracizing Mrs. Wheeler from much of polite society.

Frances's education was as irregular as her mother's marital life: sometimes she had a governess; sometimes she attending finishing schools. Two of her school years were spent traveling through Europe in her mother's wake. For a few years she attended a girls' preparatory school in Boston, boarding with friends of her mother. By the time she was seventeen, her formal education was completed. She could speak fluent French, Spanish, and German, had a working knowledge of Latin and Greek, had mastered mathematics through calculus, was intimate with the great works of literature and history, and was engaged to be married.

Her fiancée was a gentleman farmer, a banker, and a career politician, Henry Wilder Keyes who would serve as Governor of New Hampshire during World War I and later be elected to three terms as United State Senator. She married Keyes at the age of eighteen. He was twenty-two years older than she. Together they had three sons. While in Washington, she was a notable hostess. To keep up appearances, the

Senator and his wife had to entertain lavishly. To pay for these entertainments, Mrs. Keyes wrote. She supplied a regular column to *Good Housekeeping Magazine* entitled "Letters From a Senator's Wife" and served as its foreign correspondent. She covered Washington, United States politics, and world events for several magazines. Year after year, she wrote: two novels and a collection of her columns were published in her husband's first term, one novel in his second, four novels and two works of non-fiction in his third term. Ironically, it was at the end of Henry Keyes' senatorial career and shortly before his death, that his wife's writing career took off. It is hard to imagine a man elected to the Senate who had no money. Today, only millionaires can even afford to run. But in 1919, this was not the case. However, although Frances Keyes began to publish her work because her family needed the money, she had been writing all along. The low ebb in the family fortunes was her excuse. Whether or not Henry Keyes ever truly repaired his finances is not known. What is known is that once her work received recognition and financial recompense, Frances Parkinson Keyes came down from the attic, took the manuscripts out of the bureau drawer, and wrote openly for the rest of her life.

One of the most distinguishing features of Keyes' writing from the very first novel onward was her ability to evoke a sense of place. She never wrote about an area which she didn't know intimately. Each house and each region in which the protagonists lived became as important a character as the human beings whose trials and tribulations she chronicled. Her early novels were set in the Connecticut River Valley where she had grown up. Later she used Washington and politics for her background. Virginia, where she was born, and where she spent time during Harry's tenure in office, also served as a setting for several novels. Finally she discovered Louisiana which proved to be her most popular setting. Although she occasionally returned to New England, and also set several novels at least partially in Europe, the use of an exotic Southern locale became her trademark.

Her first published novel, *The Old Gray Homestead*, describes a New England family whose previously prosperous farm has deteriorated due to the mismanagement of the impractical father Howard Gray

whose prospects for prosperity seemed excellent; but he grew up to be a dreamy, irresolute, studious chap, a striking contrast to the sturdy yeoman type from which he had sprung -- one of those freaks of heredity that are hard to explain. He went to Dartmouth College, traveled a little, showed a disposition to read -- and even to write -- verse. As a teacher he probably would have been successful; but his father was determined that he should become a farmer, and Howard had neither the energy nor the disposition to oppose him; he proved a complete failure.

(*The Old Gray Homestead*, p. 11)

The Grays have eight children. While James and Ruth have married and left home, there are still six remaining, including Austin, a wild young man in his twenties who is resentful of his family's poverty and expresses his dissatisfaction by drinking and consorting with "loose" women. Just as Howard is described as good pioneer stock gone to seed, the Gray's home is described in the same terms:

The old house...was almost bare of the cheerful white paint that had once adorned it, and the green blinds were faded and broken; the barns had never been painted, and were huddled close to the house, hiding its fine Colonial lines, black, ungainly, and half fallen to pieces; all kinds of farm implements, rusty from age and neglect, were scattered about, and the two dogs and several cats lay on the kitchen porch amidst the general litter of milk-pails, half-broken chairs, and rush mats.

(*The Old Gray Homestead*, p.11)

Into the poverty of the Gray's life, comes Sylvia Carey, a mysterious, wealthy young widow from New York. She is seeking a refuge in which to recuperate from some hideous experiences and illnesses she does not reveal. Sylvia is kindness incarnate. In one episode after another, she skillfully manipulates the Grays into allowing her to pay for some improvement to the farm or some luxury for one or another of the family members. Because Sylvia is cold and uncomfortable, the farm gets modern plumbing and electricity. Sylvia needs to practice the piano, and she does so

by teaching the Gray's musically gifted daughter Mary. Sylvia wants a garden, so the Grays clean up their yard. Sylvia arrives in April, and

By the first of August, the "Gray Homestead" had regained the proud distinction, which it had enjoyed in the days of its builder, of being one of the finest in the country. The house, with its wide and hospitable piazza, shone with white paint; the disorderly yard had become a smooth lawn; a flower-garden, riotous with color, stretched out towards the river, and the "back porch" was concealed with growing vines. Only the barns, which afforded Sylvia no reasonable excuse for meddling, remained as before, unsightly and dilapidated.
(*The Old Gray Homestead*, p.25)

By Christmas, not only has Sylvia transformed the entire family and won Austin's love, but she has bought up the mortgage to the farm and had Austin burn it as her Christmas present to the family. Of course this is a wonderful fairy tale. Farm families who have fallen on hard times don't have fairy godmothers show up on their doorsteps, just as they are about to give up, but Sylvia's explanation of why she has done so much for the Grays sums up the philosophy that Keyes espoused over and over in a variety of contexts for the next fifty years:

"I know you don't want -- and you don't need -- charity; but you did need and want --someone to help just a little -- when things had been going badly with you for so long that it seemed as if they never could go right again. You'd lost your grip because there didn't seem to be anything to hang on to.
(*The Old Gray Homestead*, p.68)

In other words, nothing is so bad that just a little push in the right direction can't fix it. And in general, it's a woman who must give the push. In 1962, forty-three years after it was first published, *The Old Gray Homestead* was reissued in paperback and retitled *Sylvia Carey*. The author wrote one of her famous forewords in which she described the publication of the novel. She ended, "the upper Connecticut Valley...has continued to hold forth fresh promise for the future. It is women like Sylvia Carey who help it to do so." (*The Old Gray Homestead*, p.6) From her first novel, Frances Parkinson Keyes saw women as the means of salvation for men, for the land, for the

world in general. In part this constant theme goes a long way towards explaining her appeal to women.

The woman as redeemer appeared even more heavy-handedly in her second book, *The Career of David Noble*. In it, David Noble, the son of a poor farmer, has managed to escape his rural background and become a notable surgeon. Although David has worked hard to achieve his goal, he fails to recognize that without the aid of Jacqueline Huntington, the wealthy young girl who befriends him and later loves him, and the support of his mother, whom he dismisses as an uneducated grouch, he never would have left the farm. David sees himself as a morally superior person in comparison to Jacqueline who leads a frivolous life of pleasure; and he breaks their engagement when he comes upon her in the arms of one of his rivals, never realizing that Jacqueline was struggling to escape from the man. In the climax of the book, he literally runs over her in order to realize what a treasure he has almost lost. In David Noble Keyes presented her typical lover/spouse: a man who fails to appreciate his wife's merit, a man who takes for granted the love of a saintly woman until he almost loses her, often as in David Noble's case through serious illness or near death. Yet Jacqueline, and indeed most Keyes heroines loved their obtuse, other-directed mates. David was unusual in that he renounced his career in favor of his love. Later Keyes heroes would continue to pursue fame at any cost. Their wives would protest but remain faithful.

Anne Conrad in *Queen Anne's Lace* is Keyes first political wife, and readers often assumed that Anne was an autobiographical portrait of the author. Anne, like Keyes, married a rising politician who became Governor and then Senator from New Hampshire. However, in the preface to the 1952 edition, the author protested, "Indeed, a great many persons, when *Queen Anne* first made its appearance, were certain the story was autobiographical...this conviction is a mistaken one." She confessed that her knowledge of the Washington social scene allowed her to describe the plight of an

uninitiated Senator's wife, but would own no more. In some ways she was honest with her readers. In others, Keyes was lying, not only to the public, but also to herself. Frances Parkinson Wheeler may not have grown up in poverty as her heroine did; she did not marry someone she had just met -- Harry had been wooing her since she was fifteen; and, growing up in a patrician household, she didn't need her husband's friends to instruct her about gracious living; but it is quite possible that the shape of Anne Conrad's marriage resembled the author's.

Neal Conrad is Keyes' typical egocentric hero. He loves his wife madly but is so busy pursuing his political goals that he fails to realize that difficult childbirths and years of financial strain have made Anne a listless semi-invalid. Anne's skill as a homemaker has consumed all of her energy; the sparkling, intelligent girl he married is a thing of memory. Neal must be taught to cherish his wife by his friend Clarence Hathaway, a man who himself is in love with Anne. It is my guess that Harry Keyes like, Neal Conrad, was single-minded in pursuit of his career. In the memoirs that Frances Parkinson Keyes left she reveals the difficulties she experienced in her marriage. Harry Keyes was hostile to her writing; he was relatively oblivious to the medical problems she suffered during pregnancy and childbirth; his family was opposed to their marriage and created difficulties for his child bride; he was financially troubled, but continued to spend without paying his bills until his wife was publicly embarrassed in the store where she went to purchase a dress for his inaugural ball. In *Queen Anne's Lace*, Neal's family opposes his marriage; Neal Conrad fails to appreciate his wife's talents; Neal Conrad is so busy pursuing a career that he ignores Anne's illness; he spends without a thought of how to pay his bills until Anne intervenes. Was Neal Conrad modeled on Harry Keyes? It's possible.

Whether or not Anne was Keyes's alter ego, she was the archetypical Keyes heroine who made it all possible for her husband. It is Anne's ability as a homemaker and gracious hostess, Anne's charm and wit, Anne's warmth and intelligence, Anne's

presence in general that makes it possible for Neal Conrad to succeed. He may have the ambition, and even the political savvy to become governor, senator, and finally president. Anne, as a wife, mother, and helpmate, however, sustains Neal. She is his spiritual *raison d'être*. Physically, life may have been hell for Keyes heroines, but the payoff was beatitude on earth. They were living saints. By the end of any of her novels, the heroines were worshiped like goddesses. Here is Anne at Neal's inauguration as President.:

The President-elect had entered the chamber...and taken his place in front of the raised platform.... And when he had done so, he lifted his eyes to the Senators' gallery, just as a lady with a soft, full cloak partially covering a dress of heavy deep- cream lace came down the aisle and took her place in the vacant seat For a moment she sat with her head bent.... Then she looked up, and across the Chamber, meeting the President's eyes, seemed to steady herself; and putting her arms around her children, rose with them to accept the tribute of applause which rocked the room. It came from every side; from the Senators' gallery and the Diplomatic gallery and the Press gallery; from the Cabinet and Court and Congressmen. Not until she raised her ungloved right hand with a gentle gesture which at one and the same time acknowledged and checked the outburst did the tumult lessen....

"Neal told me when he took his oath of office as Senator... he was almost overcome, when he looked up and saw Anne sitting in the gallery and -- and found he could go on after all. After that he never came into the chamber without instinctively looking up to see if she were there. He did it today -- did you notice?.. No woman ever had such a tribute in the Senate before. I wonder whether any ever will again.?"

(*Queen Anne's Lace*, p. 195-196)

In general Keyes maintained a double standard for men and women. Her strong, patient, understanding heroines were matched with heroes who had wild pasts. Sowing wild oats was the rule rather than the exception. In the very first novel, Austin Gray must confess to Sylvia that he does not come to her clean and unsullied. However, Austin's peccadillos pale before the parade of heroes to come. In *Honor Bright*, the author's first best seller, Jerry Stone commits every kind of indiscretion, including having an affair with Honor's scheming sister Magdalena and getting Magdalena

pregnant. Although Honor refuses to have anything to do with Jerry or even allow his name to be mentioned in her presence during the course of his marriage to her sister, when Jerry is recuperating from the automobile accident that kills Magdalena, Honor realizes that only her love will redeem him. Nothing Jerry had done has made him utterly unredeemable. Drew Breckenridge in *Crescent Carnival*, the first of the successful Louisiana novels, has made his name a byword for licentiousness and is being named as a co-respondent in a messy, very public divorce when he and seventeen year old Patty Forrestal fall in love. Rather than losing Patty, Drew marries her and becomes a model citizen, redeemed by her love, understanding, and the wisdom she possesses far beyond her years. Clyde Batchelor of *Steamboat Gothic*, yet another Louisiana saga, has been a professional gambler, war profiteer, and allows himself to be seduced by the owner of the plantation he is seeking to purchase for his bride, the aristocratic widow Lucy Page. Yet Lucy's support and love turn Clyde into a pillar of the community who can self-righteously castigate Lucy's ne'er-do-well son Bushrod when he discovers Bushrod cheating at cards. On and on it went. Keyes heroes lied, cheated, drank too much, usually had affairs with other women, and eventually married saintly women who transformed these sinners into something approximating saintliness as well. At the end of *Steamboat Gothic*, Louise, the wife of

Clyde Batchelor's grandson Larry reflects on Clyde's life:

...Suddenly she knew that everything which had been said about Clyde Batchelor was true after all, that he had indeed been a great man, for all the handicaps he had overcome would have defeated one who was not truly great. Even his disloyalty to Lucy was revealed in a new light: Clyde's bitter memory of this transgression against her had been a constant incentive to atonement, and his reparation had been perfect and complete. Lucy herself had understood this, and compassion for her husband had, from the beginning, been mingled with her adoration for him. .
(*Steamboat Gothic*, p. 629-630)

Sadly, a truly good man rarely got his woman. In *Honor Bright*, John Stone, Jerry's honorable brother, loves Honor all his life. She prefers the dishonorable Jerry,

and John lives out his life as a bachelor. Sam Dudley in *Senator Marlowe's Daughter* waits more than twenty years for Faith Marlowe who marries one man, loves another who is already married, and finally marries Sam when he is old and blind. Clarence Hathaway who loves Anne Conrad in *Queen Anne's Lace* consoles himself in the role of family friend. In a very similar situation Ambrose Estabrook continues to love Daphne Trent from afar when she returns to her selfish husband Michael in *Parts Unknown*. For whatever reasons, Keyes regularly portrayed marriage as a union between a man with a shady past who often failed to pay attention to his wife and a woman, too good to be true, who rejected the love of a kind and good man for the love of her sinner. It is true that occasionally a good man got the girl, particularly in *Came a Cavalier* when the heroine Constance Galt actually chooses her finer suitor Tristan de Fremond over Duncan Craig, her more exciting, but sinful one. However, the few exceptions generally proved the rule.

Two other factors were constant in Keyes' romantic lexicon. First, love developed generally at first sight. Philip Starr, the good hero (there was also the standard disreputable one), in *Lady Blanche Farm*, one of Keyes' earliest novels, sees Blanche Manning swimming in a stream and immediately knows she is the woman he will marry. Clyde Batchelor falls in love with his Lucy before he even sees her because the sound of her voice is so melodious. In the three-generational saga, *Crescent Carnival*, Estelle Lenoir, her daughter Marie Celeste, her granddaughter Stella, and Patty Forrestal all know within minutes that they have met their beloveds although in the case of Estelle and Marie Celeste consummation is permanently thwarted, and Stella does not marry her love for years. In what may be the world's record for whirlwind courtships, in *Fieldings's Folly* Eunice Hale agrees to marry Francis Fielding two hours after she meets him, most of which time she has been visiting with his family while Francis is in the stables:

...With all her might, she strove, one last time, to reason with herself, to say in her soul that she would commit a folly greater than any Fielding's, if she

entrusted her love and her life into the keeping of this man whom she had never seen a few short hours before, of whom she knew no good, who stood indeed condemned by the words of his own mouth, for faults and failings the gravity of which she could not gauge. But her effort was unavailing. As long as he held her in his arms, with her head resting on his shoulder, she could see nothing objectively, she could think of nothing dispassionately. He had told her the truth when he said she would never get him out of her heart or out of her mind again. She could face this fact in all its implications. But she could not force herself to face a future in which he had no part.
(*Fielding's Folly*, p. 33-34)

The second constant was that it was not unusual for marriages to occur between very young girls and much older men. This, of course, was the structure of the Keyes' own marriage, and she used it in novel after novel. Then too, she grew up in a fatherless home and in her memoirs makes much of the fact that she craved guidance from a father-figure, regretting an estrangement from her much older half-brother as well as the lack of an long term relationship with an older male relative. *Crescent Carnival* is the most obvious example where each of the four heroines in turn falls in love at seventeen. Faith Marlowe in *Senator Marlowe's Daughter* marries at seventeen. Clarinda Darcoa in *Dinner at Antoine's* is twenty years younger than her husband. In *Lady Blanche Farm*, Blanche Manning is only seventeen when she marries Philip Starr. Honor Bright marries her cousin Adam at seventeen. Sylvia Carey has married at seventeen although in *The Old Gray Homestead* she has achieved the advanced age of twenty when she remarries Austin. It was not true that all these child brides were ecstatically happy. Honor, Faith, and Sylvia have dreadful marriages with abusive husbands, but it was true that like Keyes, they married young and usually had children immediately.

Having children was what it was all about. Motherhood, according to the author was the crowning achievement of womanhood. Pregnancy and childbirth, on the other hand were chancy, dangerous occurrences. Keyes herself had at least one extremely difficult pregnancy and suffered throughout her life from an operation that was

performed to repair the ravages of childbirth to her body. Her mother, Louise Wheeler, had had several miscarriages before Frances was born, and a miscarriage in her third marriage apparently contributed to the estrangement between her and her husband. At the turn of the century, having children was risky business. Despite the gains that modern medicine made, the author never altered her view of the process. It was a rare Keyes heroine who had an easy birth. This passage describing the birth of Constance and Tristan de Fremond's first son in *Came a Cavalier* is typical of the author's view of childbirth:

"I think I should prepare you, *Monsieur le Capitaine*. Perhaps I should have done so before, but after all, *madame* was then already *enceinte*, so what was the use? She does not have the best build for childbearing, being very narrow through the hips. Her labor is likely to be prolonged."

"You don't mean to say you think there's danger?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders slightly. "There is always danger. We call childbirth a natural function, and so it must have been once. But civilization has changed all that. I have every hope that *madame* will come through her ordeal superbly....

It was Friday night. She was suffering, but she did have the courage for it. It was Saturday morning, and her courage was leaving her, but Tristan went on telling her that she had it. It was Saturday noon, and she was in anguish; she could still hear him talking to her, but she did not pay attention to him any more. It was Saturday night, and she was in agony. She could not bear it any longer. No one could bear it and live. But it was midnight again, and still she was alive, and still she was descending further and further into this bottomless pit of a shrill wail near her and Tristan's face wet against her own.

(*Came a Cavalier*, p.339-340)

torture

Sylvia Carey, her first heroine, has already lost two children when she arrives at the Gray's farm. Later in the book, the Gray's youngest daughter Edith, is seduced by a wild neighbor and after a fall, suffers a miscarriage. She never recovers. On one hand, the reader could assume that Edith was being punished for her indiscretion; on the other, Edith is only the first of many characters in Keyes' novels who experience irreparable damage after a miscarriage, and not all of them were being punished for their sins. Eunice Fielding of *Fielding's Folly* is frightened, falls, and has a miscarriage. Honor Bright has a difficult first pregnancy; her second pregnancy is terminated by a

fall; she then has two additional miscarriages. Lucy Page has several miscarriages in *Steamboat Gothic*. Constance de Fremond in *Came a Cavalier* suffers a miscarriage after her second child is born and can have no more children. Endlessly women suffered to have children. No matter what the cost, however, they continued to fulfill their biological destiny. Immediately after the nightmare experience Constance suffers giving birth to her first son, she sees the baby:

...the nurse had brought the baby and put it against her breast. It lay there, incredibly small and helpless, incredibly bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh, incredibly fruit of that gorgeous passion flower which she and Tristan
“It won’t be so hard the next time, Tristan. I’ve always heard it never was with the second one. Don’t think that I’m afraid...”
(*Came a Cavalier*, p. 340-341)

had plu

While sexual relations and having children within the marriage was a woman’s destiny, having either without marriage was an unforgivable sin. From the very first novel, Keyes recognized that sex before marriage was not an unusual occurrence. Edith Gray is the first of many fallen angels. Like Edith, who becomes a frail invalid after her miscarriage and will probably never have any children within her marriage, the fallen angels were always punished in one way or another. In *The River Road*, the Louisiana saga in which she exhaustively chronicled the sugar cane industry (she also highlighted Mardi Gras, rice, and shipping on the Mississippi in other Louisiana novels), Cresside D’Alvery has an affair with Sylvestre Tremaine, a man unworthy of her in all respects. Cresside bears a child that is passed off as the twin of her brother and sister-in-law’s first child, since both babies are born the same night. Although Cresside does all right in the end, marrying her cousin Fabian and bearing a child she can acknowledge, she is never allowed to acknowledge her only son who is being raised as her brother’s child. Cecily Stone in *Honor Bright* has an affair with her cousin Reeves. For this, she loses Reeves who marries Clara, another more proper cousin. Then when Reeves realizes that Cecily is still the one great love of his life and has a second affair with her after both of them are married to other people, Cecily

becomes pregnant, is attacked by her drunken husband, and dies in childbirth leaving the baby to Reeves and Clara's care -- typical punishment for a fallen angel. Reeves who must live with his conscience for the rest of his life, however, does not pay with his life. Jenness Farman in *Also the Hills* betrays her country at the behest of her lover; to shield him, she takes the responsibility for his treachery in court; and commits suicide rather than go to prison when she discovers he has been using her and will not stand by her.

All of these women are examples, not only of what happened to fallen angels, but are examples of the Keyes credo of sin, guilt, retribution, and atonement. While the author did not convert to Catholicism until after her husband's death, she had been attracted to the religion for a long time. The strain of religiosity that runs through her novels is deep and pervasive. Why men weren't as brutally punished for their sins was apparently part of the double standard. Cecily Stone dies, but Reeves lives to enjoy his son, even though he can't acknowledge him as more than a cousin. Clyde Batchelor commits adultery, but is allowed to atone. Francis Fielding commits adultery more than once -- the first time on his honeymoon-- but is forgiven; and his wife Eunice is made to look priggish when, years later, she finally does leaves him after discovering one of her best friends in his arms. Later, Francis is allowed to regain his family because he has sincerely repented. Michael Trent in *Parts Unknown* has an affair which results in Michael's accidentally hitting his son Richard with an automobile. Because Michael is sincerely sorry, not only does Richard recover but Michael wins back his wife Daphne from whom he has been estranged. Merry D'Alvery blames her husband Gervais for the death of their son Franchot and leaves him. Gervais, too, is able to atone and regain Merry's love. In all of these cases, it seemed that the heroine had the ability to bestow grace upon her errant mate. Being saints on earth, women could forgive their men's sins of commission and/or omission and restore them to a state of grace.

Marriage was, of course, the primary theme of any Keyes novel. However, she had more than one agenda. Her books were imbued with the Catholic outlook she adopted as her own, and infused with a liberal spirit of brotherhood. Keyes believed that all white men and women were brothers and sisters; and her definition of “white” included most Latin Americans of Hispanic origin. Individuals of African or Asian descent, however, were another matter. For her time, however, the author’s introduction of sympathetic Jews, Catholics, Italian immigrants, Mexicans, etc. into almost all of her novels, and her depiction of happy marriages between these individuals and Americans of Anglo-Saxon descent, who were usually able to claim ancestry that dated back to the Revolution, was indeed revolutionary. The first Jewish character appears in *Queen Anne’s Lace*. He is Abie Goldenburg, a merchant in a New England town near Anne’s family’s farm. From the beginning Mr. Goldenburg is portrayed as kindly and sympathetic. None of the stereotypical grasping Jewish shopkeeper for Keyes -- her merchant regularly comes to Anne’s aid, selling her clothes at cost, helping her assemble a trousseau at wholesale prices, and later getting her a doctor when her husband is too busy to notice that she is ill. He is depicted as a man of dignity and ethics, a fatherly figure whose charitable instincts are much stronger than his desire for profit.

Three other Jewish merchants play important roles in Keyes novels. In *The River Road* another Mr. Goldenberg comes to the aid of the beleaguered D’Alvery family. He is Merry D’Alvery’s former employer, the owner of a large department store in Baton Rouge, who arranges a mortgage for the family plantation when Huey Long manipulates to ruin Merry’s husband Gervais. Later, when Merry leaves Gervais after their son’s death, Mr. Goldenberg gives her a position with the Paris office of his now multinational enterprise. Throughout his relationship with Merry, Felix Goldenberg is the soul of honor and discretion. At the beginning of the novel he is married; but later when Merry has left Gervais, Goldenberg, now a widower, never attempts to take

advantage of Merry's vulnerability. There is always an undercurrent of attraction, but he remains the gentleman. Finally, in the role of old and trusted friend, he lectures Merry concerning her reaction to her oldest daughter's upcoming marriage to the son of an Italian immigrant:.

"It has never surprised me that Madame D'Alvery opposed first her son's marriage and later her eldest granddaughter's," he said. "After all, she has had a very restricted life and she is constitutionally a woman of limited vision. One could hardly expect her to grasp the advantages of such marriages to her own family, in either case. On the other hand, it has always surprised me that you should have tried to interfere between Sybelle and Riccardo. And it surprises me still more that you should refer to Riccardo with such bitterness and contempt, as a Dago peddler's son, instead of speaking of him with pride and appreciation as an officer and a gentleman whom it is a privilege for you to welcome as a son-in-law."

(*The River Road*, p.762)

It takes a Jewish merchant to remind Merry that she herself was considered unworthy by her mother-in-law, and that her daughter's intended should be judged for what he has accomplished rather than his ethnic origins.

Even more interesting, David Cohen, the widowed Jewish merchant in *Also the Hills*, marries Rhoda Abbott, an old maid school teacher who has long since given up the idea of a family of her own. It is a Jewish man who offers the promise of new life and womanly fulfillment to this descendent of Revolutionary heroes. Rhoda's interest in David is initially aroused through his nephew Benny, a German refugee whom she is teaching. She wants to bring him to her farm for the summer, but hesitates.

"Maybe you didn't understand, Alix. You seemed to, but maybe you didn't. Benny -- Benny's a little Jew boy."

"Why of course I understood. He wouldn't have been a refugee from Germany unless he had been a little Jewish boy, would he?"

"But Alix, there's -- there's never been a Jew at the Abbott Homestead."

"No, I suppose not. And there's never been a Catholic on Farman Hill before either. But there is now. And in the future there always will be. Because my children will be Catholics, Rhoda. And *they'll* be the inheritors of Farman Hill!"

(*Also the Hills*, p. 400)

Finally, in *Victorine*, the heroine's father is Moise LaBranche, a Jew who built a massive financial empire from humble beginnings in Lafayette, Louisiana. LaBranche is a gentleman, a patrician, and an elder statesman. He is the image of gracious Southern behavior. Keyes had gone a long way from the kindness of Abie Goldenburg, an important but incidental figure in *Queen Anne's Lace* to the heroic proportions of Moise LaBranche whose Jewish daughter Victorine is the embodiment of beauty, intelligence and courage -- a woman who will marry into the most prominent family in the region -- a woman who will, of course, confer grace on her errant fiancée.

When Keyes preached tolerance, it was comprehensive. In *Came a Cavalier*, the closest neighbors and friends of the Fremonds are the Jewish Bouviers whose oldest daughter marries their oldest son. Later she described the Bouviers' suffering and almost total annihilation at the hand of the Nazis. In *Joy Street* she described a venerable Boston law firm taking in its first Jewish and first Italian associates. She wrote about marriages between Catholics from Louisiana and Protestants from New England, between Jews and Protestants, between Jews and Catholics. She wrote about the need for the old Catholic Creole families in Louisiana to infuse their deteriorating families with new blood from Protestants, from Easterners, from energetic Midwesterners, from local non-aristocrats, and about the need of decaying Protestant families in New England to welcome foreigners, Catholics, and Southerners into their midst if they were to survive. While women as the salvation of men was her primary theme, new Americans as the salvation of the American way of life was definitely a secondary theme that ran through most of her novels. From the first novel where Sylvia Carey arrives from elsewhere to save the Grays, to infuse them with new hope, new energy, and new money, Keyes saw the need for pluralism to maintain America's greatness.

This attitude may have led to her estrangement from the Daughters of the American Revolution. When she died in 1970, *The New York Times* made much of the

fact that after a two year tenure as editor of the DAR Magazine, Keyes resigned both from her editorship and the organization itself saying:

she had tried to publish a magazine “embodying a great purpose and a great ideal which should be an asset in both the material and spiritual sense,” but that “because of certain obstacles and restrictions I cannot see my way clear to carrying out this purpose.”

(*New York Times Biographical Edition*, July 4, 1970, p. 1151)

Later when her sons published her memoirs posthumously, her oldest son Henry described both her editorship and resignation in great detail, attributing the situation largely to the fact that Frances Parkinson Keyes had changed the tenor of the magazine from one in which “ladies whose photographs depicting them with be-ribboned, be-badged and be-corsaged bosoms dedicating an interminable succession of plaques” was the main feature to an “embryonic *American Heritage*.” (*All Flags Flying*, p.651) This change was resented by the membership whose budget for flowers was larger than their budget for the magazine. In addition, Keyes’ resignation from the DAR came at the time when the organization canceled Marian Anderson’s concert at Constitution Hall.

Shortly after her resignation, Keyes published her last genuinely Washington-based novel, *All That Glitters*. In it she presents a devastating portrait of the Daughters of the American Revolution. She portrays the members as a group of silly, power-hungry women who have nothing better to do than send flowers to each other, who lobby for office in an organization that does little good for a country that was facing enormous problems, including the Great Depression and the threat of war, whose greatest concerns are receiving invitations from the “right” people and being seated in the proper place at the table. Her “DAR-ling” is a mother who is oblivious to the problems of her children and basically unaware of the genuine ways of society. Keyes’ literary insistence that immigrants to the United States were its hope for the future, that Jews, Catholics, Italians, Hispanics, and Cajuns added a vitality to the culture that the old guard had lost was hammered home, often without subtlety in novel after novel.

She herself had gone beyond the pride in her ancestors which was the motivating factor in the DAR and the Colonial Dames. She recognized that it was accomplishment that made the man, not bloodlines; and she let her readers know it.

However, while the author was careful to depict European and South American immigrants in a positive light, regardless of their religious beliefs, her depiction of African- Americans was another issue. The Blacks in her novels were servants, nothing more. Most were valued servants, loyal to their families, but there was a childlike quality about them. None of the Blacks are portrayed as having initiative, intelligence, or the ability to make it on their own. All of them are family retainers. In the Southern novels, the Blacks have been with the white families since before the Civil War, still living in a paternalistic relation with their former masters. They are former slaves or the children and grandchildren of slaves. The Southern landowners treat their black servants like children who need to be regularly disciplined. It is true that some of the servants are valued for the work they do, but never for their intelligence. In *Fielding's Folly* as soon as they have a chance, the Black servants get drunk, behave in irresponsible ways, fight, and fornicate without marrying. It is a fight between two of the Fielding's servants that frightens Eunice Fielding and brings about her miscarriage. In *Dinner at Antoine's*, which contains Keyes' most sustained portrayal of an African- American, Tossie Pride, the maid of the murder victim is casually accused of the crime by a police detective so that he may smoke out the real murderer while Tossie is in jail. Much is made of the fact that poor Tossie, who is old, nearly blind, and deeply mourning her late mistress to whom she was utterly devoted, is likely to die in jail; but it takes almost the entire book for anyone to do anything about it. She is consistently portrayed as a simple, loyal creature, a victim of her superstitions, her loves and her fears, less a human being than a tool for the police to use in their investigation. Keyes' attempts to approximate the Black manner of speaking only makes Tossie sound more

ignorant. When Tossie is finally released from jail, she thanks Orson Foxworth, the shipping magnate who has negotiated her release.

“Praise Jesus, suh, so you is,” she whispered, shuffling into the room. “God’ll thank you fo’ takin’ keer uh po’ Tossie when she in such bad trouble. He sho’ly will. He gwine thank you better’n ever Ah kin. De res’ de folks been mighty kind, too.... but you made ‘em turn ol’ Tossie loose, an’ Ah ain’t never gwine forget hit, no suh, not me.
(*Dinner at Antoine’s*, p.328)

She is servile, childish, and helpless in the world without the intervention of her White folks. And like all African-Americans in Keyes’ novels, Tossie needs to be treated with a firm hand. Like Blacks, the very few Asians who make an appearance in Keyes’ works are all depicted as servants.

The third theme that runs through most of Frances Parkinson Keyes’ novels is politics. Only her first few novels were not imbued with the politics of the day. As Harry Keyes progressed through the political system and his wife was more and more involved both with his career and her own, her writing reflected the insider’s knowledge of politics which she passed along to her legion of readers. In the beginning she wrote about how the political scene affected the wives of the politicians. Anne Conrad’s neglect in Queen *Anne’s Lace* and the difficulties she experienced as the wife of a new Senator were directly attributed to her husband’s political career. Frances Parkinson Keyes knew that aspect of life well. In her memoirs and in the columns she wrote for *Good Housekeeping*, she described the unending round of calls a Senator’s wife must make and receive and the lavish amount of entertaining required. She also detailed the role of the press in creating or destroying the image of both politician and wife.

However, Keyes went on. In her next political novel, the heroine was not the wife of a Senator. She became a Senator in her own right. Faith Marlowe, in *Senator Marlowe’s Daughter*, runs for and wins what was once her father’s Senate seat, years after he was forced to retire in disgrace from the office. During the campaign, Faith, the

widow of a German aristocrat who died in battle in World War I, is accused of having been a traitor to her country during the war. Because she is friendly with one of her husband's cousins, a Spanish Archbishop visiting the United States, Faith's opponent accuses her of secretly converting to Catholicism -- a charge which alarms her very Protestant New England constituency. Negative political campaigns, it seems were as prevalent at the beginning of the century as they are now.

In the Washington novels which, aside from *Queen Anne's Lace* and *Senator Marlowe's Daughter*, include *Honor Bright*, *All That Glitters*, and *Parts Unknown*, Keyes focuses on politics at home and abroad. Most of the characters either hold elective and appointed office or are members of the press. While it is true that much of the action of the Washington novels takes place outside the Capitol, the protagonists' actions are strongly influenced by Congress, the White House and the State Department. She displayed a great deal of faith in America's elected officials, but was not above ridiculing incompetent members of Congress, portraying some of them as greedy, uneducated, and in *Also the Hills* (a novel that in theory was a return to her New England setting, but again revealed the failings of Congress) she wrote about a congressman who was betraying his country because of his sympathy for Germany.

She used *Parts Unknown* as a vehicle to describe the inequities of the Consular Service and to expose the biases of high ranking members of the State Department, in whose hands were the fates of career diplomats. In *All That Glitters* Zoe Wing, the journalist heroine, exposes both nepotism in Congress and the undue influence of unscrupulous lobbyists. In both of her novels that were more properly speaking murder mysteries, *Dinner at Antoine's* and *The Royal Box*, political activity was the motivating force behind several of the suspects' actions. Orson Foxworth in *Dinner at Antoine's* has no alibi for the time of the victim's death because he has been busy secretly trying to overthrow the government of a Central American country in order to gain shipping contracts a rival shipping company currently possesses. The F.B.I.

intervenes, reminding Foxworth that the days of the *filibusteros* are over. In *The Royal Box*, the murder victim Baldwin Castle is the newly appointed American ambassador to a volatile Middle Eastern country whose oil the United States desperately needs. Keyes uses the situation to expose the delicacy of our country's diplomatic status in the Middle East. She later describes the overthrow of the pleasure-loving, spendthrift, playboy ruler, whose regime has been shored up by the United States, by a cadre of serious patriots whose interests are not necessarily those of our government. Aside from enjoying a heady dose of romance, a Keyes fan would have been unsurprised by the Iran-Contra Affair or the Congressional check-cashing scandal or the appointment of political cronies to Ambassadorships or the power of the National Rifle Association's lobbyists or the power of the press to discredit political figures by exposing their personal lives and backgrounds. While her husband was a Republican -- and indeed with what other party could a successful New England politician affiliate -- Keyes espoused a brand of liberalism that was more reminiscent of Roosevelt Democrats. It is possible that as she changed her religion, to the shock of her New England friends and relatives, she may also have adopted a different brand of politics from that of her husband after his death. However, since it was never necessary for Frances Parkinson Keyes to have to announce her political affiliation, there is no way of validating this conjecture.

Hand in hand with the politics in her novels, Keyes injected large doses of history. Her first few novels, centered on a small New England community like the one in which she was reared, concentrated on character and plots. Her descriptions of background drew upon a world she knew intimately. When her world expanded to Washington and beyond, she became a tireless researcher, careful that each detail was accurate. When she described the arrival of an opera company to New Orleans on board a ship directly from Europe, she scanned newspapers to ascertain that such an event had occurred at least once. If she deliberately inserted an anachronism as

she did in *All That Glitters*, where her heroine drives a car a few years before it was actually marketed, her readers knew that it was an anachronism and knew that the author was aware of the fact. Keyes was a tireless communicator who felt compelled to describe to her readers all of the activity that went on in the creation of each novel. Her prefaces became famous for their length. She chronicled all the problems she encountered in writing each book. She described where she wrote, how she wrote, why she chose a particular subject. She listed every printed and oral source. She thanked her friends, employees, family, chance acquaintances who may have provided her with an obscure fact or two. She claimed that her readers loved the prefaces. Reviewers thought otherwise. In review after review, critics found it irresistible to make fun of the lengthy author's notes. *Time Magazine* began a review of *Joy Street* with a quote from the preface and a comment:

"When the final chapter of *Joy Street* was dispatched," writes Frances Parkinson Keyes in the forward to her new novel "...I was too completely exhausted to feel the slightest elation... I could not believe the ordeal was over: it had become one of those nightmares which apparently had no end, but goes on and on..."

Rare is the author who makes an accurate appraisal of personal work, even by accident, but then Novelist Keyes is something of a phenomenon.
(*Time*, Dec. 11, 1950, p. 104)

Eventually, Keyes began her prefaces with the advice that reviewers needn't read them.

Still she needed to explain herself. In all of her memoirs, she continually reiterated her belief that the only three times a lady's name should appear in print were when she was born, when she married, and when she died. Yet Keyes was continually appearing in print: first because she was the lovely young wife of a new Senator in Washington; second and more commonly because she herself was the author of the book or magazine article. Finally, tired of critics and thoughtless fans who assumed that it took no effort to produce a book, Keyes wrote the ultimate self-justification, *The Cost of a Best Seller*, a 126 page author's note that explained in excruciating detail all

of the tribulations she encountered in writing *The River Road* and every other novel that preceded it. To write about a particular area of the country, Keyes had to actually live there. In the case of *The River Road*, she rented a run-down plantation in Baton Rouge, wrote without electricity, often in great pain from a variety of physical ailments, spending great quantities of her own money to make her home habitable. She listed the endless number of letters she received from individuals who assumed she had time to send her favorite recipe, write a brief biography for a student's term paper, or lend someone money for some scheme or another. She explained why she never speaks to groups any more: bad food, inconsiderate hostesses, loss of time from writing. Most important, she explained how she viewed her work. To do this she quotes her heroine Honor Bright, who in many respects was Keyes' alter ego and whose novelistic career as a writer is certainly a reflection of the author's own:

"It's like this ... naturally I hope this ... story ... will have a huge success. Naturally I'd like to see it a big serial and a best seller and a million-dollar movie. Any writer would be pleased and proud to have something like that happen. But even that, important as it would be, would be merely incidental. What really counts is that I've put everything I have and everything I am into this story -- all the study, all the thought, all the workmanship, all the effort, of which

I'm capable. There isn't a line in it that's slipshod or superficial or insincere. there's nothing repressed which represents a vital truth, because the revelation of it might prove startling or shocking. On the other hand, there's nothing told simply because it would cause a sensation, because it's permeated with pruriency and grossness. That's the way I feel writing ought to be -- flowing and free and beautiful. I may have failed, but I've tried. And that's what really counts.
(*The Cost of a Best Seller*, p. 9)

This is what Frances Parkinson believed she was doing in each book she wrote.

The critics tended to disagree. Said one reviewer of *Steamboat Gothic*, "The latest Keyes novel... will not let anyone down. The style is reliably ponderous, the dialogue is stilted and sometimes all but interminable." (*Time*, Nov. 10, 1952, p. 126) Of *The River Road* it was said, "...lacking the spark of a single compelling character. The pace is quotidian rather than soaring." (*New York Times Book Review*, Dec. 9,

1945, p. 25) Even at the beginning of her career a reviewer said of *Lady Blanche Farm*, "Mrs. Keyes has interesting material at hand, and one feels that she knows the New England village types intimately enough to have written a much better book." (*New York Times*, Nov. 1, 1931, p. 18.) A reviewer said of *The Explorer*, "Instead of giving us a good adventure story ... *The Explorer* gives us a drawing-room fantasy that incorporates most of the clichés of the worst kind of women's magazine fiction." (*America*, Jan. 23, 1965, p. 133.) *Commonweal* described *Crescent Carnival* as having "the tedious lovemaking of a movie scenario, and the mawkish sentiment of the more lurid Victorian novel." (*Commonweal*, Jan. 1, 1943, p. 282.) Perhaps one of the strangest criticisms of her books came in a review of *Blue Camellia*, a novel about the Louisiana rice industry: "Reading her book is like eating a rice pudding of unimaginable dimensions; the monotony of the process in no way vitiates the wholesomeness of the ingredients." (*Times Literary Supplement*, Aug.. 25, 1957, p.505)

And while *Time Magazine* at one time accused her of learning to type on a cash register, she had her fans among critics as well. "Here is the first book about Boston that this reviewer has found really satisfying.... *Joy Street* presents a true picture." (*Christian Science Monitor*, Nov. 28, 1950, p.22). "No doubt too much has been said recently about escape literature. But *Fielding's Folly* is that -- a book the reader can live with for a week without coming up for air.... the most lavish of Frances Parkinson Keyes' novels." (*New York Times Book Review*, Oct., 27, 1940, p. 7) And it was said of *All That Glitters*, "...the story has life and interest: the characters are real and sympathetic, neither blacker nor whiter than people have a right to be." (*Times Literary Supplement*, Jan. 3, 1942, p. 5)

In the end, it was readers who were to judge her writing. Everything she wrote sold well. Although her earlier novels, those before *Honor Bright* in 1936, originally only had respectable sales, after she became a best-selling author, the early titles were

reissued and won new fans. At the time of her death, virtually all of her novels were still in print, still circulating regularly from library shelves. She was still the *grande dame* of popular fiction.

In assessing her *oeuvre* as a whole, the overriding impression one receives is earnestness: the meticulous historical research; the evocation of place; the persistent characterization of immigrants as equal to and in some cases better than the decaying aristocracy of the country; the glorification of the woman's role as savior of her mate; the deification of motherhood at any cost. Keyes' readers could learn a great deal from her books -- how sugar and rice were cultivated and milled; Huey Long's role in Louisiana politics; the lottery speculation in nineteenth century Louisiana; stud farms in France; archaeological expeditions in Peru; the role of the consulate in American foreign policy -- all were accurately portrayed in great detail. The reader could meet heroine after heroine who succeeded in careers in a man's world: Faith Marlowe became a Senator; Zoe Wing, a brilliant foreign correspondent; Honor Bright, a best selling author; Merry D'Alvery, an executive in the fashion industry. Yet all of these women were unfulfilled until they took up their true roles as wives and mothers. The reader could view hero after hero overcoming the natural failings of men because of the grace conferred upon them through marriage to a good woman. The reader could know the author herself, not only through the lengthy prefaces that explained the *raison d'être* of any novel, but also through the four volumes of memoirs she published: the two documenting her life through the Twenties, and the two explaining her conversion to Catholicism and her writing career.

While none of the novels were strictly autobiographical, a close reading of the memoirs indicates that Keyes used virtually every incident she experienced, observed, or about which she heard, somewhere in a novel. If she saw a bride catch her heel in a grate while walking down the aisle, the incident appeared in *Honor Bright*. When her son became ill with a tropical fever in Singapore, a hero in Fielding's *Folly* shared the

same fate. Yet the endless parade of career-obsessed husbands who genuinely loved their wives, but often forgot to offer proofs of affection while busy pursuing fame and fortune may well have been modeled upon Harry Keyes. Likewise, the dewy-eyed teenage virgins who married men twenty or more years older than themselves, may have represented the emotional experiences of the eighteen year old Frances Wheeler, just as the reportorial and authorial successes of Zoe Wing and Honor Bright surely described the author's own mature experiences.

In the last analysis, Frances Parkinson Keyes brought escape to millions and millions of readers from the drudgery of their lives. She told the woman in the kitchen whose children were fretful and whose house needed cleaning that it was all worth while. She made them feel like goddesses. If their husbands ignored them, it didn't matter. Husbands were only men, lesser creatures who needed the love of a good woman to achieve their better selves. She preached tolerance and brotherly love. She showed her readers other worlds peopled with the wealthy, the glamorous, and the powerful. She was a woman of her time, believing that women could be as successful as men, but rejecting that success as secondary to marriage and motherhood. While her beliefs may not be consonant with those of today's liberated women, they have a validity of their own. In *The Cost of a Best Seller*, Frances Parkinson Keyes reproduces a letter from a reader that may best sum up her contribution:

I have spent so many happy hours with your books that I have felt for some time I would like to write you and express my sincere thanks for all the pleasure you have given me.

I am a busy housewife and mother of three lovely children, but oh, how restricted life can be at times! I cope with housework, baking, mending, the children, and at the same time I do try to be a happy companion to my husband. But you know it can be awfully difficult to be an interesting and inspiring wife when for days and weeks on end life holds nothing but the daily round, the common task.

Your books have opened up many beautiful and fascinating vistas for me. In your company I have seen many strange and lovely cities and have learned of many different customs and ways of living. All this has been a great delight to me, but you have helped me in a more important way still. Your deep conviction that the role of wife and mother is the most worthwhile a woman can

have, has done more to help me over the drab, dull spots than anything else I can think of. Your lovely heroines have inspired me to buck up and try again when I am in danger of degenerating into a mere overworked housekeeper. Once more I become a real personality with an interest in life, and I hope, a more stimulating wife and mother in consequence.

Thank you for all the happiness you have given me, and I hope this letter may have given you some small pleasure too.

(*The Cost of a Best Seller*, p, 119-121)

What author could ask for a better tribute.

BOOKS BY FRANCES PARKINSON KEYES

NOVELS

The Old Gray Homestead, 1919
The Career of David Noble, 1921
Queen Anne's Lace, 1930
Lady Blanche Farm, 1933
Senator Marlowe's Daughter, 1933
The Safe Bridge, 1934
Honor Bright, 1936
Parts Unknown, 1938
The Great Tradition, 1939
Fielding's Folly, 1940
All That Glitters, 1941
Crescent Carnival, 1942
Also the Hills, 1943
The River Road, 1945
Came a Cavalier, 1947
Dinner at Antoine's, 1948
Joy Street, 1950
Steamboat Gothic, 1952
The Royal Box, 1954
The Blue Camellia, 1957
Victorine, 1958
Station Wagon in Spain, 1959
The Chess Players, 1960
Madame Castel's Lodger, 1962
The Explorer, 1964
I, The King, 1966
The Heritage, 1969

SHORT STORIES

MEMOIRS AND COLLECTED PIECES

Letters From a Senator's Wife, 1924
Silver Seas and Golden Cities, 1931
Capital Kaleidoscope, 1937
Along a Little Way, 1940
The Cost of a Best Seller, 1950
All This is Louisiana, 1950
Roses in December, 1960
All Flags Flying, 1972

BIOGRAPHIES OF SAINTS AND OTHER CATHOLIC WORKS

Written in Heaven, 1937
The Sublime Shepherdess, 1940
The Grace of Guadalupe, 1941
Therese, Saint of a Little Way, 1950
Bernadette of Lourdes, 1953
Mother of Our Saviour, 1955
Land of Stones and Saints, 1957
Frances Parkinson Keyes Christmas
Gift, 1959
Mother Cabrini, Missionary to the
World, 1959
The Third Mystic of Avila, 1960
The Rose and the Lilly, 1961
Three Ways of Love, 1963
Tongues of Fire, 1966

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

The Restless Lady and Other Stories, 1963 Once on Esplanade, 1947

OTHER WORKS

The Happy Wanderer, 1935

Pioneering People, 1937

Frances Parkinson Keyes Cookbook, 1955

A Treasury of Favorite Poems, 1963

BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL INFORMATION ABOUT FRANCES PARKINSON KEYES

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INEZ HAYNES IRWIN

When a committed feminist, an active suffragist, writes novels, mysteries and children's books, does she preach her political gospel? Is it possible for a very political person to write more than thirty works of fiction without a trace of her militancy appearing in the texts? In the case of Inez Haynes Gillmore Irwin, the realm of fiction and the political reality seem to be separate entities. True, some of her novels dealt with women's issues from a more sympathetic viewpoint than a male colleague may have presented, but her seventeen children's books and six mysteries could have been written by any individual of good conscience. So here is the case of Inez Irwin -- who supported the most militant feminist group of her day, the National Women's Party-- earning her living writing nonthreatening children's books, not very thrilling detective novels, and contemporary novels -- more than forty titles in all. And yet, in a quiet way, she did preach her gospel. She wasn't strident and certainly not blatant, but her novels could not have been written by a conservative. In fact, in many of her books, Inez Irwin managed to describe a world in which women triumphed as she knew they could.

In order to find the feminism in Irwin's novels, it is important to understand the author's own brand of feminism. In 1989 Mary Kathleen Trigg completed a doctoral dissertation at Brown University entitled *Four American Feminists, 1910-1949 : Inez Haynes Irwin, Mary Ritter Beard, Doris Stevens, and Lorine Pruette*. In the dissertation Trigg distinguished between Victorian feminism and modern feminism. Inez Irwin and Mary Beard were her examples of Victorian feminism.

One of the most striking differences between Victorian and modern feminism involved the relationship feminism had to sexuality and marriage. While women in the nineteenth century often found emotional support, intimate friendship, and even sensual love in their relations with other women, twentieth century women turned away from their own sex in their quest for intimacy with men. The New Morality and sexual liberalism of the 1910's and 1920's -- promulgated as avidly by young feminists as by any segment of the society -- left an older generation of feminists, still reticent about sexuality, puzzled and uncomfortable. The 1920's companionate marriage ideal, which the "revolution in manners and morals" led to, undercut feminist resistance to marriage by glorifying it as democratic, affectionate, passionate, and necessary for a fulfilled life. For the first time in history, women began to equate a feminist life with a married life; thus, the modern women's dilemma, the precarious balancing act of achieving both marriage and career was born.

... While nineteenth century women used female friendship/ separatism and the belief that women were different from men as a springboard for feminist activity, twentieth century women couched feminism in terms of male/female relations and the similarity of the sexes.
(Trigg, p. 1-2)

In other words, Victorian feminists glorified friendships between women, viewed women as different from men, and did not see marriage as the crowning achievement of a woman's life. Because social attitudes continue to change, a late twentieth century feminist may find herself in agreement more with the Victorian than the modern feminist. The feminism of the 1970's saw a return to the ideal of feminine friendship and a denigration of marriage although continuing to reject the idea that men and women were essentially different from each other.

Born in 1873 and dying in 1970, Inez Irwin lived long enough to see feminist ideology come almost full circle from the Victorian attitudes of her youth to the radical feminist ideals of the late twentieth century. She personally believed in the importance of feminine friendship and associations. Her own life is an example of that belief. Trigg describes Irwin's lifelong friendship with Maud Wood Park whom she met when they were students at Radcliffe College. Until Park's death in 1955, no one was as important to Inez as Maud -- neither her first husband Rufus Gillmore, nor her second husband Will Irwin, nor her many sisters and brothers, nieces and nephews. In Trigg's

study, she quotes copiously from Irwin's letters to Maud. The effusions of love sound more like those of lovers than mere friends: "She routinely addressed her in letters as 'my angel,' 'my dear,' 'my beautiful and beloved Maud' and described their friendship as 'ardent.'" (Trigg, p.138) In addition to her friendships with specific women, Irwin gloried in her multitudinous associations with women throughout her life. She says in her unpublished biography, describing the suffrage movement:

This struggle, which engaged all my youth and much of my maturity, is a part of my life on which I look back with a sense of satisfaction, so soul-warming that I find no adjective to describe it. What women I met! What fights I joined! How many speeches I made! How many words I wrote! But best of all -- what women I met! How I pity any generation of women who cannot know that satisfaction.
(*Adventures of Yesterday*, p. 463)

On the cusp between nineteenth and twentieth century feminism, Irwin married, not once, but twice. She divorced her first husband, rejecting an unhappy marriage as unacceptable. In her second marriage to Will Irwin, a fellow journalist, the author found happiness and the ideal companionate marriage. In her autobiography she describes her life with Irwin. It was a marriage of minds, bodies, and souls.

As I look back on the friendship, the forty-four-years-old friendship which existed between Bill Irwin and me, and which in the meantime crystalized into a marriage, which was thirty-two years old, it seems to me that it was one long adventure, overlaid with conversation.
(*Adventures of Yesterday*, p. 573)

There is no superlative she omits in describing their union. She had no children, perhaps because of her feminism, but also perhaps because her own family history gave her a desire for a very different life than her own mother led.

Born into a prominent, but poor Boston family, Inez Haynes knew first hand the experience of a large family. Both of her parents came from families of six or more siblings, most of them female. Her father, Gideon Haynes, had had seven children with his first wife and ten with his second. She was his fifteenth child. By the time she was born, Gideon Haynes was approaching old age. In his youth he had been a

Shakespearean actor, a Massachusetts legislator, and a prison warden -- nationally known for his views on prison reform. Irwin's mother, Emma, was twenty-two years younger than her husband and only four years older than her oldest stepchild. Trigg reports that the Haynes family was a happy and unconventional one. Inez had one aunt who was an ordained minister, another involved in the spiritualist movement. The family was liberal, well-connected, and supported the idea of higher education for all of its members who were interested or able. In 1892, her father died; a year later, her mother committed suicide, unable to live without her husband; at the age of twenty, Inez Haynes was on her own.

That Irwin rejected her mother's life is obvious. Aside from her long, happy, childless marriage to Will Irwin, she lived twenty-two years after her husband's death. She was always fond of children and devoted to her nieces and nephews and their children, but her own progeny were her books, her articles, and her political activity for the betterment of women. She was prolific, writing more than forty books, and numerous articles. Her last children's book was published in 1955 when the author was 82. In her lifetime, her books were quite popular. The children's series which was begun in 1909 continued to sell well into the 1950's; her novels received moderate acclaim; and her non-fiction is still available in libraries. However, except for a few of the novels, little of her work is well-regarded today. It is unfortunate because several of her novels are definitely engaging and the early children's books have a certain charm that is enduring.

Irwin began writing for children in 1909 when she published *Maida's Little Shop*, the story of a poor little rich girl, wasting away from a childhood illness, who is restored to health by her association with a group of poor children from Charlestown, a Boston suburb. Dedicated to her niece Phyllis, much of the book is based on the author's own childhood adventures and experiences growing up in Charlestown. Although she experimented with other characters and plots, including a novel in 1915 about some

feisty orphans called *The Ollivant Orphans* and *Janey* which chronicled a summer in the life of a precocious nine-year-old, Maida and her friends proved to be Irwin's formula for success in the children's market. Over the years Inez Irwin wrote fifteen Maida books. In each of the books Maida and her friends are taken to some wonderful location or given some fabulous possession to manage for the summer: for example, a camp in the Adirondacks, a lighthouse off the coast of New England, tourist cabins, a zoo, a little theatre. They have fun, and they learn something at the same time. The early books are not only charming, but also fascinating for what they tell the reader about Irwin's theories concerning childrearing, family, education, and friendship, as well as moral values.

In the first book, *Maida's Little Shop*, the reader is introduced to Maida Westabrook, the only daughter of a wealthy financier, Jerome "Buffalo" Westabrook. Maida's mother has died, and Maida, born with a hip deformity, has spent her early childhood undergoing a series of operations to allow her to walk. Although the Westabrook millions have repaired Maida's hip, no one has given her a reason to live. One day Maida expresses an interest in a tiny toy and candy store she sees in a poor neighborhood in Charlestown. Her father and his friends decide that giving Maida the shop may restore her will to live. So the shop is purchased from its elderly owner, refurbished, and renamed "Maida's Little Shop." Maida and her nurse Granny Flynn move into the apartment above the shop where they live incognito, as it wouldn't do for the newspapers to discover Buffalo Westabrook's daughter keeping shop. In no time Maida is a favorite with the neighborhood children who teach her to play, just as she teaches them good manners and moral values. At the end of a few months, Maida is healthy and full of life; Granny Flynn has found a long lost daughter; all the children in the neighborhood have become better people; and the Westabrooks go happily off to Europe.

Irwin did not intend to write a series initially. It wasn't until twelve years later in 1921 that she wrote the second "Maida" book, *Maida's Little House*. *Maida's Little School* waited another five years until 1926. Then after a hiatus of thirteen years she began writing earnestly, *Maida's Little Island* and *Maida's Little Camp* in 1939 and ten additional "Maida" books in the next sixteen years. The best of the books were the earlier ones. The last six or seven books were fill-in-the-blanks formula books in which Buffalo Westabrook places the children in some unusual setting where they have a very tame adventure, learn a very slight moral lesson, and the book ends. They were, for the reason of their blandness, very popular in the 1950's when the burgeoning middle class was looking for tame entertainment for its little girls. Few parents were aware of the subversive content of the early books, or the liberal view of education the author proposed.

Maida's little gang consists of herself and seven friends, five of whom are introduced in the first book. The other two join the group in *Maida's Little House*. Rosie Brine is a tomboy who can outperform almost every boy physically. Arthur Duncan is older, bigger, stronger, a natural leader who, with Rosie, spends his days playing hooky from school and exploring Boston. Dicky Dore is, like Maida, crippled. He is a very kind boy, unable to attend school because of his infirmity, who takes care of an infant sister for their widowed mother. Harold and Laura Lathrop are the local rich kids. Laura, in particular, is insufferable, showing off her toys and other possessions to her less affluent neighbors and delighting in the fact that what she owns is better than anything else in the neighborhood. On the whole, her brother Harold displays no personality at all. The other two children, Tyma and Silva Burle, are gypsies whose tribe camps on the Westabrook property in the summer. These children, known as the Big Eight, comprise the group who enjoy Maida's "latest little possession." (*Contemporary Authors*, Vol. 102, p. 288)

In *Maida's Little Shop* the story is still grounded in reality. The children have families, and some of the expected problems of poverty. Arthur's father is a widower who has very little control over his son's actions. High spirited Rosie doesn't understand her mother's restrictions and rebels against them constantly. Dicky's mother is so poor that she cannot afford to hire anyone to watch her baby while she works, nor can she take Dicky to the type of doctor who could cure his lameness. In the most interesting episode in the book, Arthur, who resents Maida's intrusion into the neighborhood, decides to steal some art supplies from her to give to Dicky. Dicky, who can't afford to buy the supplies, will use them to make objects he will sell in order to buy his mother a Christmas present. Maida discovers the thefts, confronts Arthur, and between them, they resolve the issue. Later, however, Rosie hears about the episode, and tries to explain Arthur's motivation to Maida:

"You see Arthur took those things to give away to Dicky because Dicky has such a hard time getting anything he wants."

"Yes I saw them over at Dicky's," Maida said.

"And then there was a great deal more to it than that. Arthur's just told me and I thought you should know it at once. You see Arthur's father belongs to a club that meets once a month and Arthur goes there a lot with him. And those men think that plenty of people have things that they have no right to -- oh like automobiles -- I mean, things that they haven't earned. And the men in Mr. Duncan's club say that it's perfectly right to take things away from people who have too much and give them to people who have too little. But I say that may be all right for grown people but when children do it, it's just plain *stealing*. And that's all there is to it! But I wanted you to know that Arthur thought it was right -- well sort of right -- when he took those things. You don't think so now, do you, after the talking-to I've given you?" She turned severely on Arthur.

Arthur shuffled and looked embarrassed. "No," he said sheepishly, "not until you're grown up."

(*Maida's Little Shop*, p. 158-159)

This is quite a message for tiny tots. Don't steal now, but later it may be necessary to "liberate" some rich individual's possessions to give to more deserving persons.

One other message comes through loud and clear. That is the message that wealth is not necessarily a good thing. Maida cannot get well despite all her father's

material goods. It takes the poor children of Charlestown to give her a reason for living. It is playing simple street games, making things by hand, learning to cook, and caring for others that make her life worth while. Even more obvious, the one rich girl in the neighborhood, Laura Lathrop, is nasty. The first time she comes to Maida's shop, they have the following exchange:

"How much is that candy?" the girl asked, pointing to one of the trays.

Maida told her.

"Dear me, haven't you anything better than that?"

Maida gave her all her prices.

"I'm afraid there's nothing good enough here," the little girl went on disdainfully. "My mother won't let me eat cheap candy. Generally she has a box sent over twice a week from Boston. But the one we expected today didn't come."

"The little girl likes to make people think that she has nicer things than anyone else," Maida thought. She started to speak. If she had permitted herself to go on, she would have said: "The candy in this store is quite good enough for any little girl. But I won't sell it to you anyway." But, instead, she said as quietly as she could: "No, I don't believe there's anything here that you'll care for. But I'm sure you'll find lots of expensive candy on Main Street."
(*Maida's Little Shop*, p. 66-67)

Later Laura improves, but only after she nearly dies of diphtheria. Maida and Dicky who are always angelic, have also always been ill. So not only is money *not* the key to happiness, but illness is an improving quality. Of course, most nineteenth century books had the same attitude. For example, the perennial favorite *What Katy Did* by Susan Coolidge, published in 1873, describes an engaging hoyden who becomes the sweet little angel of the family after she suffers a terrible illness.

Aside from the issues of wealth and illness, there are three icons of American culture that the author examines and finds lacking. They are the traditional family, the educational system and traditional sex roles. Parenting, for example, in the Maida books is rather unusual. More to the point, the natural parents seem unable either to raise or control their children properly. Rosie, for one, is constantly disobeying her mother. One night she comes to visit Maida with this story:

"My mother was awful mad with me just before supper," Rosie began at once. "It seems as if she was so cross lately that there's no living with

her. She picks on me all the time. That's why I'm here. She sent me to bed. But I made up my mind I wouldn't go to bed. I climbed out my bedroom window and came over here."

(*Maida's Little Shop*, p.164)

It is Maida and Billy Potter, one of Buffalo Westabrook's friends, who teach Rosie that it is important to obey her parents, something that Mrs. Brine never achieves on her own. In fact, Rosie only learns to value her mother, when during a difficult pregnancy that necessitates hospitalization, her mother disappears for several months.

The Lathrops are also poor parents. Laura has become a snob, and Harold is not much better.

Mr. and Mrs. Lathrop were well-to-do. When Mr. Westabrook first met them, he had liked them the least of any of the parents.... It seemed to him that Mr. Lathrop, who was much older than his wife, had no interest outside of making money and that Mrs. Lathrop had no interest outside of the social advancement of her children.

(*Maida's Little Camp*, p.11)

It takes Maida and the other children to make likable people out of Harold and Laura. The Lathrop children, like Rosie, must learn their values from people other than their parents. Arthur, too, as was noted in the stealing episode, has learned from his father socialistic values that are inappropriate in everyday life, and needs Maida and Rosie to set him straight.

The prize for worst parents, however, goes to Tyma and Silva Burle, the gypsy children, who join the others in the second book, *Maida's Little House*. Silva confides her story to Maida after Maida has discovered Nesta, the Burle's baby sister, hidden in a cave on the Westabrook property:

"You see, my mother died last February when Nesta was about three months old. After mother's death, we had all the care of her -- Tyma and I. It was very hard because my father --" She stopped for an instant and seemed to choke on what she was going to say. Then she went on steadily. "My father began to get drunk -- more and more-- But that wasn't the worst. He began to treat us badly -- and I was always worried about Nesta -- sometimes I was afraid he'd hurt her..."

"He was worse to Tyma though, and so Tyma ran away.... And then father told me he was going to be married again. I didn't like the -- the one

he was going to marry. I knew she didn't mind his drinking. She --
used to drink too...."

(*Maida's Little House*, p. 236)

The failure of all the children's parents to provide them with proper role models, appropriate discipline and moral values is what forms the basis for the fantasy that is the Maida books. After the first book when the children are in their own homes, Buffalo Westabrook invites them for a summer at Maida's house, and they never go home again. Irwin creates a world where the eight children live, study, play, and work together untroubled by their inadequate parents, where much of their behavior is improved through peer group modeling. The only parent who makes a regular appearance is Maida's father, the man whose unlimited wealth is used to create the perfect environment for children to be nurtured and educated. He is viewed more as a generous benefactor than a loving parent. The adults with whom the children have a genuinely sustained and loving relationship are their hired tutors and servants.

Having disposed with the need for parents, Irwin next disposed with traditional education. Maida and Dicky have never been to school because of their illnesses, Tyma and Silva have never been to school because of their people's nomadic lifestyle, Rosie and Arthur hate school so much that they have made an art out of playing hooky, and Laura and Harold, who are better behaved, simply dislike attending school although they have always gone.

"Mr. Westabrook addressed himself to Billy Potter. I wonder why it is that children hate school? They always *do* hate it. I hated it myself. You hated it too, didn't you, Billy?"

Billy nodded.

Mr. Westabrook turned to the Big Eight. "Why is it that those of you who've been to school hate it so?"

Arthur Duncan answered him first. "I suppose the worst thing about it, sir, is that you're indoors when all the time you're crazy to be outdoors. You feel a though you were in prison."

"And, Mr. Westabrook, you have to sit in the same seat all day long," Rosie Brine added indignantly. "And it's a very uncomfortable seat. Then you can't speak to anybody. It's not natural for children to sit all day long and not have a chance to talk with the other children about them."

“And I never had but two teachers yet,” Laura Lathrop put in, “that I really liked.”

“And I’ve never studied anything,” Harold declared, “that I’ve really enjoyed.”

(*Maida’s Little School*, p.22-23)

What follows is that Buffalo Westabrook creates a school where the children don’t know that they’re going to school. He hires interesting people to live at the Little House and merely talk to the children about interesting topics. A writer of children’s books invites them to write a book while she is writing hers. This becomes their composition lesson. An explorer teaches them geography and history while recounting his adventures. The children learn to speak French because one of the guests can speak no English. Eventually the Big Eight realize that they have been going to school all along, but enjoying it because the school wasn’t structured like a traditional school.

The Big Eight’s attitudes towards school mirror Irwin’s own. In her unpublished autobiography *Adventures of Yesterday* she describes her own Charlestown grammar School:

How I mourn, as I look back on that period of my childhood! The stupidity, the stodginess, the complete lack of illumination of any kind, in the system of education for the Boston schools. The essential pedestrianism of the teaching, the dullness of the curricula, above all the horrendous waste of time (sic). During the four years that I attended the Warren Grammar School, I do not remember that once a door opened on my boiling imagination, that any effort was made to explode my mental curiosity.

(*Adventures of Yesterday*, p. 121-122)

Clearly, *Maida’s Little School* represents an attempt to redress the *pedestrianism* of Irwin’s childhood education. Again, Inez Irwin made no attempt to convince children that their traditional schools were good for them. Just as she demonstrated that the children became better people when they were removed from their nuclear families, she described education as a process that would work only if the entire practice of schooling were dismantled.

When she described sex-appropriate behavior for boys and girls, Irwin was working from the Victorian definition of feminism that Trigg described in her dissertation. It would be foolish to look at male and female sex roles in the Maida books from the point of view of the late twentieth century feminist because current definitions don't work. The Victorian feminist believed that women were different from men -- better perhaps -- but different nonetheless. Irwin herself, according to Trigg who examined her early diaries, wished she had been born male. Like many Victorian girls, she felt the restrictions her sex endured were intolerable. In a series of articles in *Harper's Bazar*, Irwin made clear her position:

The duties and pleasures of an average woman bore and irritate. The duties and pleasures of an average man interest and allure. This seemed to be the most shameful of all my discoveries. But I soon found that it was a feeling which I shared with the majority of my kind. I have never met a man who at any time wanted to be a woman. I have met few women who have not at some time or other wanted to be men.

("Confessions of an Alien," *Harper's Bazar*, April, 1912, p. 170.)

She goes on to describe the "double standard" of experience. Men have the opportunity to experience life while women wait at home. Women get their experiences second hand from their reading and from the men in their lives. This is what she regrets most.

In the Maida series, she addresses this issue also. The girls and the boys share equally in the adventures. Rosie is always as capable as any boy and more capable than most of them except Arthur. Time and again, Irwin describes the boys assuming that the girls are not able to share in adventures, and then she deflates their male egos. A typical example of this behavior is in *Maida's Little Houseboat*. In that book the big Eight are playing on a moored houseboat that drifts to sea during a storm. They land on an island where they have camped before, and must survive on their own for a day or two until they can be rescued. During the night they hear an animal howl. The next morning the boys go off to investigate, leaving the girls behind because the animal

might be dangerous. Piqued by their attitude, Rosie decides to take a walk on her own; she finds the animal who turns out to be a friendly dog; and while the boys are out playing macho protectors, Rosie brings the dog back to the camp.

However, in general the boys recognize that the girls are their equals and allow them to participate in all of their activities; but this recognition is hard won by the girls in *Maida's Little School* when the girls go on strike. In this book, the girls begin to notice that the boys don't wish to include them in their fun. When the boys go on hikes with one of their tutors, they never invite the girls. Gradually the girls find themselves left out of many activities. The girls' anger climaxes when the group are about to make a map of a pirate treasure in order to play a joke on Mr. Westabrook. After a lengthy discussion about the style of the map, this is what occurs:

"I guess," said Arthur with a slight lordliness of manner, "when it comes to this map business, you girls had better leave it to us boys. That's a thing girls wouldn't naturally know much about. It's the sort of thing boys can do much better...."

"Well, I'm sure," Rosie said, "if you don't want me to help on your map, you're quite welcome to do it alone. It's going to be a lot of work."

"You don't hurt my feelings," Laura said, "by leaving me out."

"I should like to work on the map very much," Maida asserted angrily.

"So should I," said Silva -- but quietly.

"Well," Arthur decided, still with an air of authority, "this map-making is something that you girls can't do. So you will have to be content with helping to carry out the rest of the joke."

(*Maida's Little School*, p. 185-186)

What the girls decide to do is to go on strike. It turns out that they have been doing many things in the house that make life more pleasant for all of the children. Maida makes fresh orange juice for everyone in the morning. During the strike, she only makes it for the girls. Laura has been doing the ironing for the entire group. During the strike, she only irons for the girls. Rosie stops making desserts for everyone. Silva stops tidying up their school room. Here's how Rosie explains it to the boys:

"We girls have got tired of the way you boys are treating us. You've gradually Hood and you never invite us to go with you, although we can walk just as far as you. You play all kinds of games in the Gym, and you never ask us to join you although there are plenty of them that we could play. You made the

ice-house and wouldn't let us help. We stood all those things, but now there has come something that we won't stand. And that is -- not letting us work on the pirate's map for the joke we're playing on Mr. Westabrook and Billy....

"So," Laura went on swiftly with the tale, "we girls have decided that if you can't do anything for us, we can't do anything for you...."

"Because," Maida took up the thread, "we don't *have* to take care of any of
(*Maida's Little School*, p. 195-196)

Needless to say, in Maida's little fantasy world, a twenty-four hour strike is enough to convince the boys that the girls should be able to share in all the fun and games alongside the boys. Of course, it is inescapable that the activities the girls stop performing during the strike are very womanly. Cooking, tidying, ironing -- none of these are tasks in which a Victorian male of any age would dream of engaging. In fact, throughout the series, there is a distinct division of labor in which, for example, the boys grow vegetables while the girls tend the flower garden, or the boys construct the stage for Maida's Little Theatre while the girls weed the grounds around the theatre. On the other hand, when they first come to live at Maida's Little House, it is Harold who is the expert in making beds and teaches all of them how to make one properly, and it is Arthur who has actually cooked a meal because he's lived alone with his father and has had to learn how to cook. Subtly, therefore, Inez Irwin encouraged her little girl readers in the belief that girls could do anything as well as boys, and that they should not allow themselves to be excluded from so-called masculine activities. And while the concept of a domestic strike seems tame today, in 1926 when *Maida's Little School* was published, labor disputes were at their most bloody. The word "strike" conjured up visions of violent overthrow of the government, of unwashed radicals like the I.W.W. and foreign-born agitators like Emma Goldman. It's amusing, therefore, to see Irwin introduce her young readers to the concept of the strike, not a particularly popular activity with the conservative middle class who were undoubtedly the parents of those readers.

In *Maida's Little Camp* which the author clearly intended to be the final Maida book because of the way she summed up the futures of the Big Eight, Arthur, while hiking in the woods, has an introspective experience in which he considers the girls:

Arthur neither liked or disliked girls. As a rule he did not think of them at all. To him, a girl become a friend in exact proportion to her ability to conform to a boy's standards. In other words, at present, to Arthur, a girl was only a lesser boy. But girls as a sex, he began to realize dimly now, had qualities boys did not possess. It might be -- and this was an amazing departure for Arthur -- that those feminine qualities were as good as masculine qualities.
(*Maida's Little Camp*, p. 135-136)

Here then, was the center of Irwin's feminist philosophy. Although the girls never compete one-on-one with the boys, they are endowed with qualities equal to those that exemplify male behavior. These qualities, moreover, make the girls very valuable people. At the end of this book when Buffalo Westabrook discusses the children's futures with their parents, he envisions higher education for all of them. He doesn't believe that because the girls' fate is to marry and have children that they should learn only domestic arts. He envisions a career in art for Silva, a career in dance for Laura, Maida will go to a business college and learn how to manage her money -- not rely on her husband to do it for her, and Rosie, who is bursting with undirected talent, will become some sort of executive, and until she settles on a career, simply go to a good college. These futures were not the expected ones of the day. In an article in *Harper's Bazar*, Irwin described the average woman:

She is the most helpless of all economic figures -- the middle-aged woman incapable of self-support, skilled in nothing but housework....

In short the average woman had been dependent on a man all her life -- on her father first, her husband next, perhaps her son last.

It has not been very exciting, has it?

("The Life of an Average Woman," *Harper's Bazar*, June, 1912, p.282)

So under the treacle-sweet veneer of the Maida books, Inez Irwin was proposing a radically different future for little girls than the one that was expected, and envisioning a

radically different way of life and education for children than what was revered by the middle class.

While Inez Irwin published as many children's books as any other type of fiction, she also wrote several novels for adults as well as some mysteries and nonfiction. It is unfortunate that all but one of the adult novels are out-of-print, and that the rest have disappeared almost entirely from library shelves. Only one or two copies of any of the novels exist anywhere in the country, and three of the novels are totally unavailable except in archival collections. This is particularly distressing because some of the novels are very fine. Of Irwin's fiction, the outstanding novels are *Angel Island*, *The Lady of Kingdoms*, *Gertrude Haviland's Divorce* and *Gideon*. The first is a feminist fantasy novel, most unusual for its day; the second is a feminist examination of love and marriage from the point of view of several young women living in a formerly prosperous, but now impoverished, Cape Cod village; and the last two deal with the topic of divorce -- one, from a woman's perspective, the other, from a child's.

Angel Island is Irwin's only novel still in print. It describes the experiences of five men who are shipwrecked on a desert island where they discover five women who are not your average females. All of them have wings and spend most of their time in the air. How the men capture the flying women, clip their wings, marry them, domesticate them, and, in the end, by their callousness, force them into rebellion is the subject of the novel. In the introduction to the reissued novel, Ursula Le Guin, one of the foremost authors of science fiction in America, tells the reader:

Published first in 1914 (before women could vote), the book is a real rediscovery -- romantic, satiric, funny, fanciful, and a good read. It starts slow -- I warn you -- but don't worry! It'll begin to move, and move you.
(*Angel Island*, p. vii)

Using the metaphor of wings for the condition of women, Irwin weaves a fantasy that soars.

It is true, as Le Guin points out, that the author accepts certain stereotypes about the nature of men and women. Men in *Angel Island* are only happy when they have work to do. It is in their nature to need to dig and build, otherwise they get in trouble. Women, on the other hand, thrive on maternity -- a theme that Irwin would repeat in most of her novels. When the women discuss themselves, they describe their natures as instinctive rather than creative:

"We're the same all the time. We don't change and grow. Their work does

"Yes," Lulu agreed wonderingly, "that's true, isn't it. That never occurred to me. They really do like thinking. How curious! I hate to think."

"I never think," Chiquita announced.

"I won't think," Peachy exclaimed passionately. "I *feel*. That's the way to live."

"I don't have to think," Clara declared proudly. "I've something better than thought -- instinct and intuition."

(*Angel Island*, p. 258-259)

Yet when the flight of their children is threatened by their men's narrow-minded stereotypical views of women, the women rebel. It turns out that they are capable of thought and action, and in the end, by learning to walk on the earth, the women, despite their clipped wings, regain the sky.

The Lady of Kingdoms was a very different novel, as realistic as *Angel Island* was fantastic. Lynne Masel-Walters and Helen Loeb in *American Women Writers* describe the book thus:

Of her feminist fiction, *The Lady of Kingdoms* (1917) has been undeservedly forgotten. This long novel presents two young heroines, the beautiful and self-assured Southward and the plain and self-effacing Hester. Irwin uses both heroines to examine the conventional moralities women have been forced into, as well as the unconventional, even "immoral," ones women have chosen for themselves. Though Irwin may disapprove of the latter roles, she never condemns the women who choose them.

(*American Women Writers*, vol. 2, p. 371)

Indeed, if Irwin's portrait of a small New England town was even reasonably accurate, Grace Metalious' expose of a New England town, *Peyton Place*, written years later, was a more explicit, but paler copy of the original. In Irwin's Shayneford, Massachusetts, one bright young woman goes off to New York, has an affair that leads to pregnancy

but not marriage because the father dies, so she becomes a prostitute to support her child. Another attractive girl stays in town after she becomes an unwed mother, flaunting her baby, refusing to name the father of her child, and daring the elderly gossips to snub her. A third respectable maiden tricks the honorable young man she loves into sex so that she will become pregnant, and he will be forced to marry her. These three are not even the heroines of the novel. Southward Drake, one of the two female protagonists, says of marriage, "... it isn't necessary to my scheme of things." (*The Lady of Kingdoms*, p. 38) Hester Crowell, the other heroine, wants marriage for one reason, "I would love to have a family -- a big one. That's the only purpose matrimony serves in my eyes." (*The Lady of Kingdoms*, p. 35) As Irwin works out the surprising destinies of Hester and Southward, her depiction of a woman's lot is unflinchingly honest, sympathetic, and revolutionary for its time. Even more surprising, rather than being a feminist polemic, *The Lady of Kingdoms* is what critics call a great read, a page-turner full of well-drawn men and women whose all too human behavior is universal as well as particular.

Divorce was virtually unknown in the 1920's when Irwin wrote *Gertrude Haviland's Divorce*. The author, herself, however, had first-hand knowledge of divorce, having terminated her first marriage to Rufus Gillmore in 1913. At that time, however, she was not in the same position as her heroine. When she divorced Gillmore, Irwin was an attractive woman with a large supportive family; she was an educated woman with a flourishing career as a writer. She was deeply involved in the suffragist movement, had several meaningful friendships with women and was childless. Gertrude Haviland, unlike her creator, has let herself become obese and unattractive. Despite a college degree, she has never worked outside her home. She is the mother of three active young children, has let her associations with other women go by the wayside as she becomes more and more involved in her children's welfare, has no political interests, and no family to support her either emotionally or financially. Irwin

was the initiator of her divorce. Gertrude is oblivious to the problems in her marriage when, in the first chapter of the novel, she receives a letter from her husband informing her of his intent to divorce her and marry one of her acquaintances.

What follows in the novel is a sensitive examination of a woman who must reassemble her life in order to survive. There is little romanticism of Gertrude's dilemma. She is poor for the first time in her life. She must cope with the needs of her three distressed children who have been abandoned by their father. She faces the hypocritical sympathy of the women in her community -- each of whom is thanking the powers that be that it was Gertrude who was the discarded wife. In the beginning, she is so obsessed with her misery that she withdraws from life -- moving her family to a small New England coastal town where she owns a dilapidated, old farm house. The children run wild; their possessions remain in boxes; and friendly overtures from neighbors are rebuffed while Gertrude nurtures her agony. Then, she discovers that she is pregnant. Knowing that she is about to bring a new life into the world brings her out of the miasma into which she has descended, and she begins to take charge of her life. This is where most late twentieth century feminists would part company with Irwin's outlook on life. She describes motherhood as woman's salvation. In "The Life of an Average Woman" she said:

I leave to the last her great recompense -- maternity. There can be no doubt that to the Average Woman motherhood makes up for much. It cannot make up for all. And in point of fact there is nothing inherent to motherhood which requires her to live in a dull world.

("The Life of an Average Woman, *Harper's Bazar*, June, 1912, p. 282)

When Gertrude Haviland's pregnancy is confirmed by a doctor, she exults:

"Oh, you don't know what this means to me.... But I thought my life was over. I thought it was ended. I thought I had nothing to live for. Not even my children. I love my children. I love them devotedly. But you don't know -- you can't imagine what that cruel letter did to me... And now....

I've been numb and cold ever since. I've been frozen when I haven't burned and boiled. I couldn't even feel the children. I've blamed them -- sometimes. I've hated them. I gave them my whole time and attention and life and I lost my husband through it....

At times I've almost hated them because there was something that he built up in every one of them. But now I'm going to have a baby that will be mine. All mine! All, all mine! Nothing of him about it! I shall be father. I shall be mother. I shall be it's whole world. Oh, and what it will do for me..."
(*Gertrude Haviland's Divorce*, p. 142-143)

Once you accept the premise that impending motherhood will free Gertrude from the depression in which she has been languishing, Irwin brings into focus the second half of her premise -- that motherhood will not require her heroine to live in a dull world. The reader observes Gertrude settle into the community and make it a better place for her, her children, and her neighbors to live, develop means of supporting herself, and in general become one of the most admired women in the region. But, unlike the children's books, this is no fairy tale. Gertrude's progress is measured step by painful step. Her rehabilitation suffers setbacks as well as victories, but her persistence pays off in the end. When the heroine's former husband returns eight years later to make her a humiliating offer of remarriage -- his second wife had recently died -- Gertrude's triumph is as complete as her refusal. Small wonder most of the critics loved the book. Praise ranged from "the story is told with admirable straightforwardness," in the *New York Tribune* (11/29/25, p. 8) to "a brilliant piece of work. It is carefully done, finished and perfect" in the *Boston Transcript*, (11/25/25, p. 8).

The other book that explored divorce was *Gideon*, a very different piece of work. In it the protagonist is Gideon Hallam, a seventeen year old whose parents have been divorced for many years. Gideon, who has always lived with his mother, discovers in the course of the summer that his father is not the villain the boy assumed he was, and that his beautiful mother is not at all the goddess he has been worshiping. While the author was less good at portraying the turmoil of an adolescent boy than she was at exploring the anguish of a middle-aged woman, *Gideon* again is an attempt by Irwin to explore the various causes and effects of divorce. She offers her readers a chance to

look at the mechanics of a marital breakdown -- something that wasn't done often in her time, and never from the point of view of the person most effected -- the child.

On the whole, Irwin's fiction was female oriented. In *P.D.F.R.* she drew a portrait of the hedonistic "Roaring Twenties" generation with their hard drinking and sexual promiscuity. Most of the men in the novel are rotten: one is carrying on with a vamp while his lovely wife becomes so distraught she commits suicide; one is interested in the wealthiest bride he can charm, whether she be twenty-five or sixty; a third sits back helplessly and watches his wife engage in one affair after another, drowning his unhappiness in bootleg gin. The women fare better because most of them have some innately good qualities that come to the fore in the face of tragedy. In *Youth Must Laugh* she described a family somewhat like her mother's with seven sisters making a series of marriages that, with the exception of the one mirroring her parents', were not satisfying. In *Out of the Air* Irwin, who seriously believed in ghosts, described a relationship that was fostered by the interference of several well-meaning ghosts. In *Family Circle* she chronicled the loves of a large New England family over a thirty year period.

For the most part, her heroines triumphed despite the stupidity of the men around them. But her heroes were not always idiots. The father in *Gideon*, the young writer in *Out of the Air*, the two oldest brothers in *Family Circle* -- all of them were admirable individuals because Inez Irwin was not a man-hater. Although she saw the social and economic predicaments of women as needing redress, she did not believe that these predicaments made all men evil. Her contribution, through her fiction, to the woman's movement was to portray women who could take care of themselves -- women like Gertrude Haviland who survives her divorce and becomes a better person for it, and Margaret Rhodes in *P.D.F.R.* who, during her twenty-five year marriage, is "wife, farmer, housekeeper, secretary, nurse, companion" to an invalid husband on a farm in Africa (*P.D.F.R.*, p. 27). Susannah Ayer of *Out of the Air* several times outwits a gang

of thieves in New York; and Southward Drake of *The Lady of Kingdoms* calmly shoots a man attempting to force her into prostitution; and most particularly the five flying women in *Angel Island* who refuse to let their love for their husbands ground them and their children indefinitely. Although not all of Inez Irwin's novels could be termed hard-core feminist, with the exceptions of *Angel Island*, *The Lady of Kingdoms*, and *Gertrude Haviland's Divorce*, she did in all of them what she did in the Maida books. She created positive images of women who were educated, intelligent, capable and worthy of the same respect as men.

It would be wonderful to add that her mystery novels performed the same function for women as the children's books and contemporary novels. But this is not so. The mysteries are a disappointment. All of them were written when Inez Irwin was in her sixties and seventies. They are long out of print and only three are still obtainable in any library in the country. At best the mysteries are a paean to Scituate, Massachusetts, the Cape Cod community where she owned a summer home and to which she retired. They are, at least the ones still available, all set in the fictional town of Satuit, a gracious New England village replete with history, beautiful historic homes, antiques, and very nice people who occasionally kill someone. The books contain loving descriptions of mansions, exquisite furniture, the New England countryside, and certain New England-type characters. Other than that, they are unmemorable. The book entitled *The Women Swore Revenge* promises from its title some role for the female characters, and indeed, the murder victim is a woman, her friends more or less help the police investigate the murder, and one of the murderers turns out to be female as well. But on the whole, the helpful women are portrayed as needing assistance from their male protectors, or in the case of the villainess, needing the instigation of male co-conspirators to carry out dastardly deeds.

Inez Irwin's mysteries, like all of her fiction received mixed reviews. For every reviewer that hated a book, there was another one who praised it. While the *New York*

Times reviewer said of *The Women Swore Revenge*, “the story comes nowhere near living up to the promise of that first paragraph,” (*New York Times*, October 13, 1946, p. 40), another reviewer said, “Her new story is meatier than most puzzle tales, easy on the ear, complex, but lucid.” (*Weekly Book Review*, September, 29, 1946, p.28). While one reviewer said of *Youth Must Laugh*, “The book is written painstakingly without any sense of style,” (*New York Herald Tribune Books*, Sept. 4, 1932, p.6) another said of the same novel, “Mrs. Irwin has managed with high technical skill to interweave the lives of all these characters into a perfectly unified narrative...” (*New York Times*, Sept. 4, 1932, p. 11). Sometimes the critic, as in this review of *Family Circle* even praised and damned her in the same review: “There is much that one can say in praise of this novel; there is almost as much to be said in censure.” (*Boston Transcript*, March 18, 1931, p. 3) However, in her long career as a writer, everything she wrote pleased at least some reviewers and many readers. Even her mysteries which one reviewer dismissed as “padded, pompous, and pretentious.” (*New Statesman and Nation*, July 4, 1936, p. 24) had their fans.

Inez Irwin’s non-fiction was as political as her fiction appeared to be apolitical. Magazine articles like “Confessions of an Alien,” and “The Life of an Average Woman” carried disclaimers in front of them.

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the writer. They are not the opinions of the editors, nor are they in harmony with the editorial policy of *Bazar*. They are published here because they are interesting and brilliantly presented, and because experience shows that our readers always enjoy a new point of view, even when they do not share it.

(“Confessions of an Alien,” *Harper’s Bazar*, April, 1912, p. 170.)

In 1914 she published an article in *Harper’s Weekly* on the trial of several members of the I.W.W. involved in a strike in Wheatland, California. Her defense of the defendants was so stirring that the American Civil Liberties Union reprinted the article as a pamphlet that was widely distributed. At one point she reports in *Adventures of Yesterday* that she was being referred to as “ the reddest woman in America,” a title

that she found amusing, but felt was more appropriate to the American anarchist leader Emma Goldman (*Adventures of Yesterday*, p.323).

Her two major works of non-fiction were a history of woman's accomplishments in America, *Angels and Amazons*, and a history of the struggle for suffrage, *The Story of the Woman's Party*. In particular, *The Story of the Woman's Party* was criticized for its omission of any mention of the work of suffrage groups other than that of the Woman's Party led by Alice Paul. But the reviewers were unanimous in noting that there existed no other contemporary account of the suffrage campaign. To this day, Irwin's history remains a major primary source for scholars of the era. *Angels and Amazons* is crammed with facts concerning the achievements of women between 1830 and 1930. It is, however, too much of a catalog of virtues and a list of names to be pleasant reading. Like all of Irwin's books, however, most of her non-fiction is extremely readable. Her style is breezy and conversational. Her chronicle of the fight for women's suffrage could be a novel rather than an historical account.

When she graduated from Girl's High School in Boston, Inez Haynes was chosen to read her honor's paper, *Byron, Shelley and Keats*. A newspaper report of the graduation exercises reported her endeavor thus, "Rather an ambitious attempt it was, but as a product of girlhood, a wonderful thing." She remembers in her autobiography, "When I read it I said to myself, 'If this is true, I can learn to write. I am going to be an author.'" (*Adventures of Yesterday*, p.183)

Yet when she looked back over her long career, she said of herself:

But I reiterate, I cannot think of any book or article of mine that was really important enough to be written. I cannot recall a sentence which bore a message. And, there, I think I put my finger on my great lack. I have no message.

(*Adventures of Yesterday*, p. 518-519)

She also said:

Sometimes I think I might have been a better writer if I had not known Bill Irwin. He was so good, so noble, at the same time so electric, so fascinating, the nearest approach to a word I want to use is lovely, that I was more interested

in him than in my work.
(*Adventures of Yesterday*, p. 589)

Writing, however, was rewarding. For Irwin it was an adventure. The profession she chose for herself in her teens was the profession she practiced well into her eighties. And although she deprecated her work, she loved what she did and was thoroughly professional. Particularly pleasurable was her success with children's books. She said:

Writing for children has been enormously enjoyable. I use the word *enormously* with careful thought; for to my mind of all the words that suggest volume, *enormously* suggests the most....I had got well into the little shop before I realized, or seemed to realize, how much fun Thackeray, Dickens, Hawthorne, Stevenson, and Kipling must have extracted from writing children's books. And when the letters from children began to arrive, I realized it over and over again. Children are an appreciative audience. And sometimes they are, unconsciously valuable critics... How I worked over those books! Bill and I read the manuscripts together, hammering at every word and phrase. Always I wanted to keep the vocabulary a little above the child's vocabulary. Always I wanted to put in the story something that meant beauty and wonder, a little above the material plane. Anyway, my sales seem to indicate that hundreds of children have enjoyed reading those books. I cannot begin to say how much I enjoyed writing them.
(*Adventures of Yesterday*, p. 514-515)

These are the self-assessments of Inez Irwin in old age. It is, of course, easy to take her at her own value, assuming that for all her intense political activity, her fiction bore no message. It may be true, also, that from the time she married Will Irwin, she ceased to devote herself to her craft. However, the evidence in her fiction controverts the easy way out. Books like *The Lady of Kingdoms*, *Gertrude Haviland's Divorce*, *Gideon*, and *P.D.F.R.*, all written after her marriage to Irwin, were not sentimental or merely descriptive. They provided role models for women readers, and men too, in Irwin's subtle way. The children's series about Maida and her friends not only preached an obvious little moral at the end of each book-- something a young reader could ignore, but also drew a picture of a world where children loved to learn, respected each other, and learned that females were as good as males -- something that was too subliminal to be easily discarded. Earning her own way in an age when women stayed home, militating for the rights of women, caring about the underdog in every aspect of American life, Inez Haynes Irwin left a body of work, much of which still

has the power to delight. It's a pity that her books are rapidly disappearing -- many of them forever.

BOOKS BY INEZ HAYNES IRWIN

NOVELS

June Jeopardy, 1908
Janey, 1911
Phoebe and Ernest, 1912
Phoebe, Ernest, and Cupid, 1912
Angel Island, 1914
The Lady of Kingdoms, 1917
The Happy Years, 1919
The Native Son, 1919
Out of the Air, 1921
Gertrude Haviland's Divorce, 1925
Gideon, 1927
P.D.F.R., 1928
Confessions of a Businessman's Wife, 1931
Family Circle, 1931
Youth Must Laugh, 1932
Strange Harvest, 1934

MYSTERIES

Murder in Fancy Dress, 1935
Murder Masquerade, 1935
The Poison Cross Mystery, 1936
A Body Rolled Downstairs, 1938
Many Murders, 1941
The Women Swore Revenge, 1946

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Maida's Little Shop, 1909
The Ollivant Orphans, 1915
Maida's Little House, 1921
Maida's Little School, 1926
Good Manners for Girls, 1937
Maida's Little Island, 1939
Maida's Little Camp, 1939
Maida's Little Village, 1942
Maida's Little Houseboat, 1943
Maida's Little Theater, 1946
Maida's Little Cabins, 1947
Maida's Little Zoo, 1949
Maida's Little Lighthouse, 1952
Maida's Little Hospital, 1952
Maida's Little Farm, 1953
Maida's Little House Party, 1954
Maida's Little Treasure Hunt,
1955

NONFICTION

The Californiacs, 1916
The Story of the Woman's Party,
1921
Angels and Amazons, 1933

BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL INFORMATION ABOUT INEZ HAYNES IRWIN

Contemporary Authors, Volume 102, Gale, 1981.

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VI. CONCLUSION

Having read almost two hundred novels, many of them more than once, and having written over one hundred pages analyzing these novels, *vis-a-vis* the lives of their authors, it seems appropriate to draw some conclusions. In *Flaubert's Parrot* the author Julian Barnes asks the question:

Why does the writing make us chase the writer? Why can't we leave well enough alone? Why aren't the books enough? Flaubert wanted them to be: few writers believed more in the objectivity of the written text and the insignificance of the writer's personality; yet still we disobediently pursue. (*Flaubert's Parrot*, p.12)

From the very first, there were individuals among my friends and family who asked similar questions. "Why do you want to write about those women? Isn't it enough to read their books? Is there something unique about their lives?" Of course, the answer was that I cared, that I saw in each of these women's lives an amazing strength of purpose that allowed them to become working authors against all odds. I was, from the outset, in awe of women who fought for the time to write.

Tillie Olsen writes in her book *Silences* about the difficulty women encounter when they wish to write:

Wholly surrendered dedicated lives; time as needed for the work; totality of self. But women are traditionally trained to put others' needs first, to feel these needs as their own (the "infinite capacity"); their sphere, their satisfaction to be in making it possible for others to use their abilities. (Olsen, *Silences*, p.17)

Two of these authors overcame great difficulties in order to become writers. Janet Lambert, as a military wife and mother, never wrote down the stories she told her daughter until that daughter was grown. Lambert never published a word until she was forty-seven. Frances Parkinson Keyes fought the censure of her mother and husband, writing secretly until she was thirty-four. The collapse of their family finances finally forced her husband to recognize her ability and to allow her to write for publication. Georgette Heyer, who was always encouraged to write, wrote to support an extended family that not only included her husband and son, but also her widowed mother and two brothers. In essence, her writing made "it possible for others to use their abilities." It was many years before other members of her family began to contribute to the coffers; and because of her constant financial pressures, Heyer was always writing under a deadline. She never had time to complete her serious historical work or even the leisure to write slowly or revise a manuscript. Inez Irwin also decided at an early age on a career in writing and successfully pursued it in an era when women were expected to stay at home and raise large families. She made a conscious decision to write rather than have children; and when, at the age of forty-two, she finally found happiness in her second marriage, her writing lost its bite as she devoted herself to life with her husband.

For all four of these women it is clear that the act of creation was often an heroic effort. It is equally clear that they were women with stories to tell. Their heads were full of tales they wanted to share with the world. Even the author with the slightest talent, Janet Lambert, was a born storyteller. It's not difficult to imagine Lambert, regularly transferred from one army post to another, creating this fantasy world of joyful "army brats" for her daughter. Penny Parrish and Carole Houghton could have been her most constant companions. Unlike her neighbors on post, Penny and Carole would always be with her. Georgette Heyer also began writing by telling stories to entertain her family. She, however, was fortunate in that family. Her father encouraged her from

the outset, helping her obtain a publisher by the time she was nineteen. And if her family always saw to the fact that she had time to write, it was not always for altruistic motives. They needed the income her tales provided. This, of course, was the reason that Keyes was finally allowed the time to write. It may have been difficult for Senator Keyes to admit it, but he was also dependent on his wife's writing income for his comfort and that of their children.

All four of these women were compulsive writers. Inez Irwin was the least prolific. She only published forty books. Each of the others wrote at least fifty books. They wrote their lives into their books. Frances Parkinson Keyes, who protested that her novels were not autobiographical, used virtually everything she ever experienced in her stories. Georgette Heyer, who refused to give interviews, told her readers to look for her in her books. Irwin and Lambert both drew extensively on their experiences to create their characters and plots. More important, all four women imbued their novels with their personal philosophies. Irwin's feminism, Lambert's conservatism and patriotism, Heyer's desire for a more orderly society, Keyes deeply-felt Catholicism -- all are intrinsic to the fabric of the individual author's novels. A reader cannot ignore the essential messages the novels broadcast.

Messages, however, can occasionally backfire. Since beginning this project, I have encountered three women who, when they were teenagers, devoured every novel Janet Lambert wrote. Not one of them is a full-time homemaker. All three are highly educated -- two have Master's degrees; one, a Ph.D. They all have full-time careers and families as well. They are all sophisticated, tolerant women who are concerned about women's issues. Obviously, three women is an insufficient sample from which to draw any conclusions, particularly when most of my acquaintances are well-educated women who pursue full-time careers. It is important, however, to recognize that the readers of women's fiction do not necessarily fit any stereotypical image.

To examine the readers of romance fiction, it's best to look at the research of Janice Radway, a professor of American Studies at Duke University, in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*. In the introduction to the first edition of her study, Radway rejects the popular view of academics concerning popular culture:

In sum, it is clear that the commonplace view that mass cultural forms like the romance perform their social functions by imposing alien ideologies upon unsuspecting if not somnolent readers is a function of a particular theory and method. This theory assumes that cultural commodities control those who purchase and use them because the meanings they conceal within cannot help but be revealed to readers, even if unconsciously, and thereby must affect their values and beliefs. This method consequently discounts what readers *do* with texts and the various statements they make about them as irrelevant or mistaken.

(*Reading the Romance*, p.4)

Radway looks at the theory that reading romance fiction is a way of reinforcing the values of a patriarchal society and finds it lacking. What she discovers is that for many women the act of reading is as important as the story within the book's covers. Reading becomes a subversive activity. It is a means of escaping those very activities that Tillie Olsen described which prevent women from writing. Radway discovered that the act of reading is a method of refusing "to place others' needs first." Women who read cannot be interrupted. They take time from "making it possible for others to use their abilities." She also discovers that readers related to the heroine's independence, her spunkiness, her ability to take control of her life. They tended to ignore the passive aspects of the heroines in romance fiction. While this is a brief and incomplete summary of Radway's findings, what she discovered is relevant to the examination of the four authors in this study.

Indeed, teenagers may not have read the novels of Janet Lambert only for the happy ending. Capable young women who made careers for themselves, wives who coped well in the absence of their husbands, and daughters who took charge of their families must have been appealing to girls on the verge of adulthood. Frances

Parkinson Keyes also drew portraits of women who could take care of themselves, and indeed they had to, given the abysmal array of men who were her heroes. Georgette Heyer wrote of androgynous women of perception and ability, whose intelligence and sense of humor were often the qualities that won them mates. Inez Irwin wrote of little girls who could climb trees as well as boys, girls who refused to be left out of adventure simply because of their sex and who proved to be as adventurous and resourceful as their male schoolmates. Then, too, simply reading the novels allowed the readers to flee from whatever quotidian responsibilities awaited them.

Therefore, if the act of writing is heroic, and the authors portray themselves as heroines at their most heroic, and the reader is often engaged in an act of rebellion as well as escape by the mere fact of her reading, there exists a triumvirate of positive circumstances surrounding the writing and reading of women's fiction. There can be no doubt that many readers are like the one who wrote to Frances Parkinson Keyes, women who used her novels as a reminder that although their lives seemed dreary and discouraging they were engaged in the most glorious adventure of womanhood, that of wife and mother. This fan supports the theory that romance literature shores up the values of patriarchal society. Other fans, like the woman who had told and retold Georgette Heyer's novel *Friday's Child* to her fellow political prisoners in a Rumanian jail for over twelve years in order to keep up their spirits, support the positive values of escape literature.

Completing the research for this study, I made many unexpected discoveries. Some of them were silly, but amusing. For example, neither Georgette Heyer nor Frances Parkinson Keyes pronounced their surnames as I would have assumed. The former pronounced "Heyer" as if it were written "hare." The latter pronounced "Keyes" to rhyme with "size." Others were puzzling. All four authors were young women during the struggle for women's suffrage in the United States and England, and all of them led non-traditional lives compared to most women of their generation, yet none of them,

except Inez Irwin, even commented in their works or memoirs on this momentous event. Some of my discoveries were of a procedural rather than a substantive nature. As a librarian, I discovered the obstacles a researcher, even a skilled one, must overcome. I had almost completed the chapter about Inez Irwin when it occurred to me that the way to find her earlier works was to look under the name of her first husband. Thus, I was finally able to read her most feminist works, including *Angel Island* and *The Lady of Kingdoms* which were published under the name of Inez Haynes Gillmore. I was astounded to discover that there were standard reference works which failed to provide complete citations in their bibliographies, thus making it almost impossible to trace a source. Worse, there were authors who failed to provide bibliographies at all, casually mentioning sources in oblique ways but omitting the information that would allow anyone else to locate these sources. And there were pleasures as well. Discovering Mary Kathleen Trigg's doctoral dissertation on American feminists and Janice Radway's study of romance literature were unexpected delights. Among the pitfalls of writing this study, my major concern was to avoid plagiarism. Jane Aiken Hodge, in her biography of Georgette Heyer, came to several conclusions I had reached independently. She cited several passages from the author's works that I had already selected to illustrate my text. It is to be hoped that I have not used her material without attribution, but there is irony in my predicament. Georgette Heyer's admirers have plagiarized her works endlessly. It is altogether appropriate that only in my study of her life and writing I found myself faced with a similar problem.

All of this brings me back to Julian Barnes' questions. Why did I chase these writers? Why couldn't I leave well enough alone? Weren't the books enough? I chased them because I wanted to know how they managed to write, and to write so much. I wanted to know what in their lives led them to portray the life of women the way they did. The books may have been enough at the outset, but I like them so much

more for knowing and loving their creators. I appreciate the effort that went into each publication, and the fact that despite societal disapprobation they told their stories and made life better for their readers. I am glad that they weren't silenced.

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